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THE MYSTERY DIMENSION OF THE EUCHARISTIC LITURGY IN NARSAI'S LITURGICAL HOMILIES

Dr. Jose Kochuparampil

CATHOLIC MORAL THEOLOGY FROM THE EASTERN AND EAST SYRIAC PERSPECTIVES

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A REFERENCE POINT FOR ALL PEOPLE**

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NEWS

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EDITORIAL

Second Vatican Council invites the Eastern Churches to preserve their heritage everywhere. "Means should be taken therefore in every part of the world for the protection and advancement of all the particular Churches..." (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 4). This protection and advancement of Churches is possible only when the members of these Churches faithfully live their theology, spirituality, liturgy and discipline, for it is in them the ecclesial patrimony subsists (CCEO, 28). It is in fact this proper identity of each individual Church that enriches the communion of Churches.

The Council Fathers go on to say: "With regard to the authentic theological traditions of the Orientals, we must recognize that they are admirably rooted in Holy Scripture, are fostered and given expression in liturgical life, are nourished by the living traditions of the apostles and by the works of the Fathers and spiritual writers of the East; they are directed towards a right ordering of life, indeed, toward a full contemplation of Christian truth" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 17). As the source and summit of Christian life, liturgy is the primary *locus* of the specific heritage of any Eastern Church. Theology is best expressed and communicated in liturgy which is its living source. This is the reason why our first entry is on liturgy by Dr. Jose Kochuparampil, "The Mystery Dimension of the Eucharistic Liturgy in Narsai's Liturgical Homilies."

In the Eastern Churches morality is the practical way of living the Christian faith. Faith is in the Gospel i.e., in the person of

Jesus of Nazareth that he is the Son of God and the promised Messiah. Faith in the person of Jesus necessarily involves obedience to his teachings. The unity of faith and moral life is a living reality in the Oriental Churches. If liturgy is the celebration of faith in symbols, moral life is the celebration of the same faith in practical daily life. The second article in this issue, by Dr. Dominic Vechoor, "Catholic Moral Theology from the Eastern and East Syriac Perspectives" highlights this aspect of the celebration of faith in Christian life.

Monasticism as a complete dedication of oneself to the service of the Lord is an important expression of spiritual life in the Church. From the very early period of the Church a few believers are given this call to radical discipleship, to leave everything behind and to devote whole life to the liturgical prayer, community life and work. Dr. George Thomas OIC in his article, "Eastern Christian Monasticism: A Symbolic Synthesis of Christianity and a Reference Point for All People" excellently exposes salient features of Eastern monasticism.

Today we hear much about eco-philosophy, eco-theology, eco-spirituality etc. In this context the fourth article by Dr. Joseph Naduvilezham on "The Eco-face of Jesus" is a timely guide. This article complements an earlier one by the same author in *Christian Orient* (XXIV, 3), "The Eco-Spiritual Vision of St. Ephrem."

Dr. Andrews Mekkattukunnel
Section Editor

CHRISTIAN ORIENT

EDITORIAL

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The Mystery Dimension of the Eucharistic Liturgy in Narsai's *Liturgical Homilies*

Dr. Jose Kochuparampil

Introduction

One of the striking elements in the fifth-century East Syrian scholar and director of the famous school of Nisibis, Narsai's (399-502) liturgical homilies is the emphasis given to the mystery aspect of Eucharistic liturgy. In the appendix of R.H. Connolly's English edition of Narsai's *Liturgical Homilies*, E.Bishop explains the aspect of fear and awe in Narsai's commentary on the eucharistic liturgy.¹ Further he demonstrates that unlike the Capadocian Fathers and earliest Egyptian liturgy of the Euchologion of Serapion, Narsai shares with John Chrysostom and Cyril of Jerusalem, the feeling of awe and dread attached to the eucharistic liturgy.² In a study on the liturgical mysticism of Theodore of Mopsuestia, J.Quasten points out that while St.Ambrose uses the figure of bride and bridegroom to describe the relation of the soul to the Holy Eucharist, Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom and Theodore of Moptuestia and later East Syrian Narsai

employ the figure of glorious King and servant. He concludes that this approach of the Antiochene authors is the result of a peculiar religious sentiment and attitude that arose out of their special stress on the divine majesty and royal power of Christ, in order to counter any influence of the Arian heresy, which denied the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father.³ Apart from these observations, little study has been done on the mystery dimension of the Eucharist in Narsai's liturgical homilies.

This short study is an attempt to examine the various aspects of the Mystery dimension of the eucharistic celebration in Narsai's homilies. We take Narsai's three liturgical homilies that deal with the celebration of Eucharist, namely homily 17, an *Exposition of the Mysteries*, which deals exclusively with eucharistic liturgy,⁴ and homily 21, *On the Mysteries of the Church and Baptism*, and homily 32, *on the Church and the Priesthood*.⁵ Regarding the authorship of homily 17, recent studies

1. E.Bishop, "Appendix" in R.H. Connolly, *Liturgical Homilies of Narsai*, Text and Studies (Cambridge 1905) 92-97.

2. Ibid. 93-96.

3. J.Quasten, "Liturgical Mysticism of Theodore of Moptuestia," *Theological Studies* 15 (1954) 431-439.

4. NA, hom 17, 1-32. Hereafter NA = Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies of Narsai*, Intro and trans., R.H. Connolly, *Text and Studies*, Cambridge 1905.

show that this homily is of sixth century origin, and it bears the mark of Narsai's literary and theological style, and therefore, it could have been written by a Ps.Narsai, if not Narsai himself.⁶ The emphasis on the mystery dimension of the liturgy is a common feature in all these homilies.

1. The Mystery Dimension: A Revelation of God by Means of the 'Raza

The key word that Narsai uses to signify the mystery aspect of the liturgy is the Syriac 'rāzā. It is on the basis of the Syriac concept of 'rāzā that Narsai builds his mystery theology. 'Raza, a Persian loan word, which in turn is borrowed from Proto Aryan *rahas*, means mystery. It is employed twice in the book of Ben Sira in a secular sense (Sir 8:18, 12:11). In the book of Daniel (Chapters I and IV in the large Aramaic section) the term 'rāz appears in its comprehensive sense which, involves the realisation of God's plan for the salvation of mankind. In the Dead Sea scrolls, the term 'rāz appears fifty-five times in its cosmological and eschatological significance.⁷ The Jewish exegetical technique in the Qumran Pesar explains that the real meaning of some Old Testament passages is referred to the

founder of the Qumran community.⁸

The 'rāz means the secret plan of God, and God shows it us through symbols. 'Rāzā is very probably the Semitic term lying behind Paul's use of *Mysterion*,⁹ the mystery so far hidden, and now fully revealed in Christ. The Early Syriac writer Aphrahat (+after 345) uses the term 'rāzā with the meaning of 'type' or symbol of Christ in scripture, and in the sacrament of baptism and Eucharist.¹⁰ Coming to Ephrem (306-373), 'rāzā are symbols, but it means more that the Greek *typos* and *mysterion*. Symbol or 'rāzā in Ephrem should not be understood in the modern sense which tends to imply something essentially different from the reality it symbolises, but more in a strong sense where the reality is some how present.¹¹ Ephrem views 'rāzā as a meeting point of the past, present and future, and it has particular implications in the liturgy, as it deals with the mystical presence of Christ as the central point of past, present and future.¹² Studies have shown that the thought patterns and literary styles of Ephrem influenced Narsai to a great extent together with the Antiochene theologian Theodore of Moptuestia (+ca. 428).¹³ Based on these early traditions, Narsai presents the extraordinary

5. NA, *hom* 32, 62-74.

6. L.Abramowski, "Die Liturgische Homilis des Ps. Narsai mit dem Messbekenntnis und einem Theodor-Zitat," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library* 78, 3 (Manchester 1996) 87-89; S.P.Brock, "Diachronic Aspects of Syriac Word Formation: An Aid for Dating Anonymous Texts" OCA 236 (Rome 1988) 321-330.

7. K.Luke, "The Technical Term Raza," *Christian Orient* 4 (Kottayam 1983) 114-119.

8. R.Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom. A Study in Early Syriac Tradition*, Cambridge 1977, 290.

9. S.P. Brock, "Introduction" in S.P. Brock, *Hymns on Paradise* (New York 1990) 42.

10. E.Beck, "Symbolum - Mysterium bei Aphrahat und Ephrem" *Oriens Christianus* 42 (1958) 19-26.

11. S.P. Brock, *Hymns on Paradise* (note 9 above) 42; S.P.Brock, *Luminous Eye: the Spiritual World Vision of St. Ephrem*, (Cistercian Study Series 124 Kalamazoo 1992, 41.

12. P.Yousif, *L'Eucharistie chez Saint Ephrem de Nisibe* (OCA 224 Rome 1984) 358.

13. T.Jansma, Narsai and Ephrem," 49-68; *id.*, "Etudes sur la pensee de Narsai, homelie No. 34: Essai d'interpretation" *L'orient syrien* 11 (1966) 147-168; 265-290; 239-429.

nature of the liturgical rites, i.e., *rāzē*, the symbols of divine realities. The divine realities are hidden (*kāsyā*) in the veil of *rāzē*, the symbols. Narsai as a liturgical commentator reveals their "hidden power" (*bāylā kāsyā*), a "power hidden from all and revealed to all."¹⁴ Therefore, for Narsai, liturgical rites are revelation of divine realities through the *rāze*, symbols of the Church.

2. Narsai's Mystical Approach

Narsai considers the celebration of the Eucharist as the "hour of the mysteries," a time of the mystical revelation of God. Eucharistic liturgy opens a mystical world of heavenly experience like that of Isaiah. Upon the greatness of their glory, the author's mind 'gazes' narrowly, and dread seized that he cannot carry on the celebration. However, the Holy Spirit encourages him not to turn back in fear and dread. He was permitted to enter the holy of holies.¹⁵ The same experience is narrated in homily 21 also. Here he shares the God-experience of Isaiah, saying that just as the coal of fire touches the mouth of the prophet, the mystery of the body and blood is like a fire that consumes the iniquities of men. That is why the celebrant is in utter anguish and dread.¹⁶ This mystical look towards the great mysteries of the Church would explain the awe and dread attached to the mysteries.

The opening of Narsai's homily¹⁷ finds parallel in the beginning of Ephrem's *Hymn of Paradise*, where also the author "stands halfway between awe and love, "the awe of its majesty restrains him from his search." Finally, he 'gazed' the paradise with the "eye of the mind." His "tongue reads the story's outward narrative while his intellect soared upwards in awe"¹⁷. The references to awe and feeling of fear and trembling before heavenly realities are seen in other writings of Ephrem also.¹⁸

It goes without saying that the numerous references to *rāzē*, the mysteries, and the mention of the "great and fearful mysteries" (= *rāzā bānā rābā w-dehilā*), itself in East Syrian liturgy of the Anaphora of the Apostles Addai and Mari¹⁹ also could have inspired the liturgical commentator to adopt a mystical explanation of the rites. It is also notable that this Anaphora time and again refers to the worshipping assembly as "sinful and humble" (= *b'thye w-bacire*), and "your humble weak and miserable servants" (= *'bdyk bacire w-balase w-dunwaye*) before the majesty of God.²⁰ Awe and dread attached to eucharistic mysteries is found perhaps for the first time in the Syriac literature in the fourth-century Persian Sage Aphrahat (+ca.345). Commenting on Holy

14. NA, hom. 32,67; hom.21, 50.

15. NA, hom 17,1.

16. NA, hom. 21, 57.

17. Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise*, trans, S.P.Brock (New York 1990) hymn 1:2-3, 78.

18. Ibid, HyM 3:6: "He beheld the Glory of the holy of holies and trembled; *Hymns on Faith* 19:3: S.P.Brock, *Luminous* (note 11 above) 108; *Hymns on Faith* 32: 5: Ibid, 78; *Hymns on Nativity* 19:1: McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns*, trans., New York 1989, 125; *Hymns on Virginty*, 25:11:ibid, 373.

19. W.F. MACOMBER, "The oldest known Text of the Anaphora of the Apostles Addai and Mari," *OCP* 32 (Rome 1966) 368/369.

20. Ibid. 360/ 361 ; 362/363; 366/367.

Communion, he says that one should approach the mysteries in "fear and trembling."²¹

The Church depicts mystically the Mysteries of the Church that are lofty, great and exalted. Through the liturgical *rāzē*, i.e., Symbols, the Church commemorates the mystery of the death and resurrection of the Son.²² Befitting the greatness of this mystery of faith, Narsai adopts a mystical (*rāzānāit*) way to explain it. The 17th homily begins in this way: "On the mysteries (*rāzē*) of the Church my thoughts mystically (*razanait*) pondered."²³ Quite often one finds the call to 'gaze' (*aced*) or to fix the eyes, or to contemplate towards the heights in Narsai's homilies.²⁴ Unless the mind ascends to the height, it cannot see it.²⁵ He says that the priest "turns the 'gaze' of all minds toward that which is hidden, that they may be looking upon secret things by means of things visible."²⁶ The mystery dimension lies in raising the minds to "see the outward things hidden by the hidden faculties of your minds. Recall the things hidden by the hidden faculties of your minds."²⁷ It is through faith that one is able to see the meaning of the mysteries. "Faith shows to the soul the hidden vision, and makes her to understand, that they may

not doubt on account of visible things."²⁸ In another place he says: with the hidden mind let us look in a hidden manner on the visible things...²⁹ Narsai's approach to the liturgical rites is mystical, in that it calls for participating in the mysteries of the Church with a mind of mystical look or contemplation.

3. Mystery in the Liturgical Space

According to Narsai, the Church in which the holy mysteries are celebrated is an earthly sanctuary in the pattern of the heavenly one: "a sanctuary on earth and a holy of holies in the heavens above. In the earthly sanctuary He commanded that (men) should perform the priestly office mystically and in the heavenly also with the same works, without doubt."³⁰ The internal parts of the church and sacred objects, all assume mystical meaning in Narsai: the sanctuary as the garden of Joseph, and the type of the kingdom that our Lord entered, the altar as the tomb of Christ, and the throne of God, the apse as the things below and above and the veil that covers the bread and wine as the type of the stone that sealed the tomb of Christ.³¹ The whole church is holy, and the priest celebrates this mystery in secret within the sanctuary, the holy of holies.³²

21. *Dem. XII Patrologia Syriaca* I, 528; J. Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism: the Christian - Jewish Argument in the Fourth-Century Iran*, Leiden 1971, 38.

22. NA, hom 17, 1-2.

23. NARSAI, *Narsai Doctoris Syri. Homiliae et Carmina*, ed., A. Mingana, Vol.1 (Mosul 1905) 280/NA hom 17,1.

24. NA, hom. 17, 1; hom.21, 60; hom 22, 35

25. NA, hom 22, 35.

26. NA, hom. 21, 56.

27. NA, hom 21, 56.

28. NA, hom 21, 60.

29. NA, hom. 21, 61.

30. NA, hom.32, 62,68; hom.21, 54.

31. NA, hom. 17, 4-5.

32. NA, hom. 17,3.

4. Mystery in the Persons of the Liturgy

Narsai sees the ministry of the priestly office as a mystical (*'rāṣānāit*) one, where the priest mystically performs on earth what Christ performs in heaven.³³ As the ministers of the mysteries, to the priests are entrusted with the treasury of the spirit to dispense.³⁴ The priest is "like a pen to the hidden power."³⁵ He is a 'mediator' between God and men, who has "the key of heights in his lips" and "depicts a mystery of life and death with bread with bread and wine", in which the hidden power of God is hidden.³⁶ He bears the image of the Lord.³⁷ The priests "in the earthly sanctuary 'imitate' the mysteries on heaven, and as a 'mirror' he shows the image of the world to come."³⁸ He calls upon the hidden One to send him hidden power, that he may give power in the bread and wine to give life.³⁹ According to Narsai, it is the Holy Spirit, who celebrates through the hands of the priests, the glorious and unspeakable mysteries.⁴⁰ The bright vestments of the priests are the symbol of the heavenly ministry.⁴¹ Therefore, for Narsai, Priestly ministry is great, greater even than that of the Seraphs, Gabriel and Michael.⁴² Narsai

also explores the mystery dimension of the role of the deacons and the people in the liturgy. Bearing the image of the angels who ministered Jesus at the time of his passion, the deacons "attend the body of Christ mystically (*'rāṣānāit*)" during the transfer and placing of gifts.⁴³ Only the children of the Church, the baptised and signed are allowed to participate in the mysteries. Narsai explains the rite of dismissal as Church's scanning of the congregation at the time of the mysteries."⁴⁴

5. Mystery in the Celebration: Unfolding of the Paschal Mysteries

The celebration of the eucharist is according to Narsai, a dreadful mystery, where the mystery of the death and resurrection of the king is celebrated in awe and love.⁴⁵ Narsai takes the idea of eucharistic liturgy as a mystical enactment of the commemoration of the death and resurrection of Christ from his master, Theodore of mopsuestia.⁴⁶ The sense of the sacred and divine presence pervades the whole liturgy. Commenting of the transfer of gifts Narsai says: "On the paten and in the cup He goes forth with the deacon to suffer. A symbol of His death these

33. NA, hom. 32, 63.

34. NA, hom 22, 38.

35. NA, 21, 47, 56; hom 22, 36.

36. NA, hom 32, 66-67; hom 21, 48, 49, 50, 56; hom 22, 34; NA, hom 17, 4.

37. NA, hom 17, 4.

38. NA, hom 32, 68; hom. 21, 49.

39. NA, hom 21, 56.

40. NA, hom 17, 21-22.

41. NA, 21, 56.

42. NA, hom 21, 47-48, 50; NA, hom 17, 4.

43. NA, hom 17, 4.

44. NA, hom. 17, 2-3.

45. NA, hom. 21, 55.

46. Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Lord's Prayer and on the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist*, ed., and trans., A. Mingana (Woodbrooke Studies, Cambridge 1933) 70, 96.

(deacons) bear upon their hands; and when they have set it on the altar they typify His burial.⁴⁷ The dismissal and Creed are intended for a spiritual preparation for the Anaphora. The celebrant draws near for the Anaphora in full awe, fear and trembling.⁴⁸ The kiss of peace and the deacon's admonition to pray are remote preparations for the great time of Anaphora. The Anaphora is a silent address of the celebrant with God, where the glory of the incomprehensible Divinity is recounted. After the Sanctus a confession of the economy of Christ is recounted at length pointing to the divine and human natures of the incarnated Son.⁴⁹ Then comes the anamneis with the institution narrative, which is followed by commemoration and petition, all are liturgical actions done before the majestic presence of God.

The Mystical narration reaches its heights when Narsai describes the epiclesis: Epiclesis typifies the resurrection of Christ.⁵⁰ "The hidden and concealed Holy Spirit descends upon and consecrates the bread and wine by the might of his power, and the feeble flesh of the priest is not burned by His blaze."⁵¹ The elevation and breaking of the bread are the mystical confession of the unity of the body and blood. Narsai explains the pre-

communion salutation of peace as the symbol of the apparitions of the risen Lord. Referring to the sacramental realism of the communion rites Narsai says: "now He appears in the reception of His Body."⁵² The body and blood is a mystery in which the power of God is hidden "that by the outward things it might gain hope towards things hidden and to the soul was promised enjoyment that is hidden in the mystery."⁵³

The Holy Communion is a nourishment and pledge of eternal life. Referring to the communion of the newly baptised Narsai says: "as milk he sucks the divine mysteries... a spiritual mother (the Church) prepares spiritual milk for his life; and insted of the breasts she puts into his mouth Body and Blood."⁵⁴ The King-servant relation is expressed during communion: "with his hands he gives the body of the King to his fellow servants."⁵⁵ Narsai wonders at the fact that mortal beings, the miserable dust, are permitted to take hold of fire!⁵⁶ He asks: "if the spiritual beings honoured in fear the body of Christ, how much more the corporal being honour the body?"⁵⁷ Narsai sees communion as the pledge of eternal life. The mystical aspect of the communion is remarkable: "the sacrament goes forth on the paten and in the cup with

47. NA, hom. 17.3.

48. NA, hom. 17, 10-11; NA, hom. 21, 50; hom. 32, 67.

49. NA, hom. 17, 14-16.

50. NA, hom 17, 20-21, 23.

51. NA, hom. 21, 58-59.

52. NA, hom 17, 23, 24.

53. NA, 21, hom 21, 61.

54. NA, hom. 21, 52, 55.

55. NA, hom. 21, 60; hom. 32, 67.

56. NA, hom. 32, 67.

57. NA, hom. 21, 56.

splendour and glory... Thousands of watches and ministers of fire go forth before the body of our Lord... Great, my brethren the mystery and unspeakable... If I should seek to write aught concerning this matter, all the parchments in all this world would not suffice me."⁵⁸ He who receives the holy Eucharist brings about invisible changes in his life: "he hides the leaven of life in the temple of his body, that his body may be sanctified by the reception of the Body of our Lord. Debts He pardons, blemishes He purifies, diseases He heals, stains He cleanses (and) purges with the hyssop of His mercy."⁵⁹ Narsai concludes the commentary on the final blessing also mystically, that it is the symbol of the blessing of Christ before his ascension to heaven. Narsai adds that it is "a type of the blessing, which is about to work in us, that we shall be raised from the dead and have put on glory we shall be lifted up on high into heaven with the Saviour."⁶⁰

Conclusion

In Narsai's homilies the Eucharistic liturgy is primarily seen as an encounter with the divine revelation of the paschal mysteries of Christ through the *'rāzē*, the symbols of the Church.

Sense of the mystery, awe and fear are associated with the mystical divine revelation in the liturgy. Together with the Antiochene influences one can also find traces of the writings of early Syriac Fathers and the East Syrian Anaphora of the Apostles Addai and Mari in Narsai's mystical approach. According to Narsai, Liturgy calls for a mystical ascend to heaven, where the glorified Christ sits at the right hand of the Father, and bestows divine graces to all those who participate in the mysteries of the Church. The liturgical space, persons and the whole rite assume mystical significance, where the salvation economy of Christ is gradually unfolded, resulting in a sacramental communion with Christ, as a pledge of eternal life. Since the content and source of the eucharistic liturgy is the risen Christ in the heavenly glory, those who participate in the liturgy are to be trained to realise the greatness of the glorious Christ and the mysteries he instituted in his Church. Narsai's mystical approach serves this purpose.

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58. NA, hom. 17, 28.

59. NA, hom 17, 29.

60. NA, hom. 17, 30-31.

CATHOLIC MORAL THEOLOGY FROM THE EASTERN AND EAST SYRIAC PERSPECTIVES

Dr. Dominic Vechoor

INTRODUCTION

Pope John Paul II of happy memory, promulgating the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* wrote: "The Church by God's providence, gathered in the one Spirit, breathes as though with two lungs, of the East and of the West, and burns with the love of Christ in one heart, having two ventricles". This was a historic magisterial recognition of the ecclesial reality of the Eastern and Western traditions in the catholic communion of Churches, re-iterating the need for a pluralistic approach to theology as against a monolithic approach of cultural universalism and liturgical uniformity. Recent studies go a step further. As Sebastian Brock, an eminent scholar of this century in the Syriac patristic studies, comments in a recent article, unlike human beings, the Church is endowed, not just with two lungs but with a third lung as well, from which she also needs to learn to breathe once again. It is an ardent desire of the Church that the 'catholic' character shall be expressed at all levels of her life and teachings, including the moral theology.

In this article, we try to analyse some preliminary considerations with regard to the possible relevance of East Syriac moral reflections in catholic moral theology. It is right to say that the Syriac Orient contributed much to the theological developments of the early

dogmas of faith, trinitarian theology, christology, soterology, liturgy, sacraments, anthropology, ecclesiology, Church discipline, monasticism, mysticism, spirituality, mariology, iconography, etc. Therefore it is natural that they would also have their own specific moral thinking. Such a study of the moral perspectives of the Syriac Orient necessarily demands a cross-reference to the Eastern moral theological reflections in general. Hence we make a study on the moral vision of the Eastern and East Syriac traditions. If catholic moral theology is to be genuinely catholic, it must take into consideration the ecclesial reality of the communion of Churches and the plurality of human cultures.

However, the possibility of an Eastern approach to moral theology is a fairly recent theological awareness in the catholic circle. Among the catholic moral theologians, it is B. Petrà, who for the first time, has spoken extensively of an Eastern dimension in moral theology. It is a very positive sign that there is a renewed interest among the scholars of the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara Churches to bring out more of the Eastern and Syriac moral perspectives. Since an Eastern moral approach is a relatively new area of study in catholic moral theology, we may not always find sufficient supporting literature from catholic authors. We will also be making use

of the contributions of well-known theologians of orthodox Christianity, a rich tradition that is often overlooked by catholic moralists.

In this study, after making a very brief analysis of the theological possibility of an Eastern approach to catholic moral theology, we will make an attempt to outline some important general characteristics of the Eastern moral theological reflections. Then we will concentrate specifically on the East Syriac tradition and its understanding of moral life as contributing to catholic moral theology. Here we will be concentrating mainly the early Syriac patristic tradition especially upto the sixth century AD.

1. THE POSSIBILITY OF AN EASTERN APPROACH TO CATHOLIC MORAL THEOLOGY

An Eastern approach to catholic moral theology is a recent theological development in the post-conciliar period. Referring to the need for a balanced re-integration of Eastern and Western perspectives in moral theology, B. Häring observes: “(In the development of moral theology) after the great schism in the 11th century, the West went its own way and the East remained foreign to the three main influences that shaped modern catholicism, namely scholasticism, the reformation and sixteenth and eighteenth century rationalism”. We firmly believe that a better acquaintance with the theological riches of each other will help us to have a holistic appreciation of catholic moral theology.

1.1. THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR AN EASTERN MORAL APPROACH

The contemporary pluralistic theological considerations lead us naturally to the

relevance and urgency of the need to learn from the East in moral theology as well.

1.1.1. WHY AN EASTERN APPROACH ?

The Easterners have their own ‘Christian ways of life’, the ‘ordering of Christian life’ and ‘spiritual patrimony’, as clearly stated in the conciliar and post-conciliar documents (LG, 23; OE, 1-3, 6; UR, 14-17; *Oriente Lumen*, 5-6). Canon 28 of the Eastern Code states: “A rite is the liturgical, theological, spiritual and disciplinary patrimony, culture and circumstance of the history of a distinct people, by which its own manner of living the faith is manifested in each Church *sui iuris*”. Each individual Church with her own apostolic Christ experience is a particular incarnation of the Church of Christ in a socio-cultural context. Every Church *sui iuris* is born of an encounter between the specificity of the culture and its enrichment, brought by the announcement of the Gospel through a determinate tradition in a particular time and space.

Since Churches *sui iuris* are the expressions of the universal Church in a given socio-cultural context, the ethos of a particular culture has its theological significance for the ethos of that Church. Each individual Church lives with the ethos of a specific culture and consequently she will have her ‘own manner of living the faith’ and specific understanding of the Christian moral life. Since the cultural situation in the East was varied and complex, we may not see a single monolithic form of Christian life among the Eastern Churches. There developed different patterns of ecclesiastical organisation and disciplines in the East (OL, 7). If the Church of Christ is a communion of various ecclesial traditions, it

is natural that her deposit of faith and morals is to be explained in the light of her different faith traditions and socio-cultural backgrounds.

It is in such a theological background that B. Petrà prophetically speaks of the possibility of an 'ethical' dimension of the Church *sui iuris*. As he explains, the different cultures have given and are continually giving themselves Christian forms and expressiveness, without losing their own identity but always growing towards a greater humanity and truth. This broadened understanding of 'rite', naturally paves the way for a particular *modus proprius fidei vivendi* or ethos of a Christian community. Commenting on the possibility of pluralistic approaches in moral theology, substantiated by cultural and ecclesial diversities, S. Majorano speaks along these lines in a pertinent way. He says:

"The multiplicity and variety of factors, indispensable for a correctness of moral theological reflections and proposals are much emphasised in these years. This has influenced, in a particular manner, the context of moral theological reflections that make it impossible today to speak of a single model of moral theology. The inculturation of faith in diverse human groups brings out the different ecclesial emphases and specific perspectives within the communion of the universal Church."

The observation of B. Häring is also noteworthy. He says: "The Church would be unfaithful to her main mission, if she were to give any one culture, a kind of monopoly in her life, her institutions and moral teachings. She must not even dream of a 'universal culture', understood in terms of uniformity, where one culture would swallow up others

or impose on others its language, thought patterns, symbols and so on. This would be tantamount to an abominable cultural colonialism". Thus it is clear that there is the possibility of a specific moral vision according to the ethos of each Church *sui iuris*, using the language of its own faith tradition and culture.

1.1.2. CONTEMPORARY UNDERSTANDING

In contemporary theological understanding, there is an opinion that moral theology as a specific branch of theology would be a Latin characteristic and not properly Oriental. Ethics as an independent theological discipline has not been cultivated very much in the East but is seen as an integral part of a holistic theological reflection. Oriental moral theology has not assumed the same systematisation as we see in the Latin tradition. B. Petrà comments on this:

"That which could be more properly said is that Oriental moral theology has assumed neither the same systematisation nor the amplitude that it has had in the Latin tradition owing to a different conception of the relationship between the Church and the world, a different penitential praxis, a different role of theology and the magisterium of the Church and finally due to the formidable influence exerted on the form of Occidental knowledge by the idea of science."

Also the different religious and devotional attitudes of the East and the West might have contributed to this. As R. Taft observes:

"The Westerner tends to emphasise the moral aspects of the sacramental and spiritual life, the strength received to aid him in his pilgrimage towards the final beatitude. Grace is seen as a principle of meritorious action,

restoring to man the capacity for salutary works. The Oriental, however, sees man more as an imperfect similitude of God, which grace perfects. His life in Christ is a progressive transfiguration into the likeness of God. Less is said of merit, satisfaction, and beatitude than of divinization, transfiguration and the gradual transformation of man into the image of God."

The distinctive mark of the Eastern Churches compared to the Western Churches is the substantial difference in the organisation of theological disciplines and the lack of a distinct form of sufficiently organised moral reflection. As E. Farrugia says, ethics in Eastern theology is never a matter of moralisation, isolated from the faith context provided by dogma in the overall context of liturgy. B. Griffith observes: "The Eastern Church has preserved a way of life and thought, which finds expression in its liturgy, which is quite different from the traditions of the West. It knows nothing of scholastic philosophy and theology or of moral theology and casuistry. But it is steeped in the tradition of the Bible, fathers and the symbolic mode of thought".

1.2. SOME GENERAL OUTLINES OF THE MORAL REFLECTIONS IN THE EAST

We have just analysed the theological possibility of an Eastern approach to moral theology. It is natural that this approach will have some fundamental orientations as well. The moral theological characteristics that we present below are some of the possible deductions that we draw from the general characteristics of the Eastern theological approach.

1.2.1. THE EASTERN MORAL THEOLOGY AS THEOLOGY OF THE FATHERS

Eastern moral reflections are mainly said to be the continuation of the moral thinking of the fathers. It needs a minimum familiarity with their theological visions, for, the fathers accompany and penetrate into the whole life of the faithful in the East. The Eastern Churches have jealously guarded the extraordinary riches of the teachings of the fathers. R. Taft observes: "the East has always retained a unique loyalty to the fathers, whose vital spirit animates the Eastern piety". As students of moral theology, if we search for a systematic moral thinking among the fathers, we may sometimes be frustrated. When we study the spiritual and moral concepts of the fathers, we may not find in them a systematic moral theological reflection as we understand it today.

Moreover, it was something impossible for them to think of theology in watertight compartments. The fathers were unaware of the distinction between morality and spirituality that became customary in later periods. They saw divine revelation as a unified whole. Theirs was a synthetic and integral theology. They never separated moral theology from theology proper. A healthy integration of the various streams of theology, biblical, liturgical, catechetical, sacramental, dogmatic, moral, canonical, ascetical, spiritual, monastic, etc. are seen in their theology. The fathers always saw *bios christianos* as a unified entity of which Christ was the centre. S. Pinkaers calls the patristic period 'the golden age of moral theology' and proposes the moral teachings of the fathers, after the scripture, as a primary source for Christian ethics. He points out three

characteristic features of the moral teaching of the fathers: the primacy of scripture, interaction with the Greco-Roman culture and a lived-in-spirituality with its thorough ascetic ideals as the high point of Christian ethics.

1.2.2. THE IDENTITY OF MORAL LIFE AS LIFE IN CHRIST

The Eastern Churches view Christian moral life as 'life in Christ', a life animated by the *Logos*, a life which originates, grows and fulfils itself in the Christification of man, *bios kata ton Logon*. The Eastern moral approach presents itself as an organic explication of the moral contents of the different aspects of this 'life in Christ'. It is a mode of being and acting according to the *ethos en Christoi kai kata Christon*. This life in Christ grows through the assimilation of man into Christ and to his gospel ethos, which is the basis of all Christian moral norms. Such a life in Christ is nurtured by the sacraments of the Church, especially by the Eucharist, and manifests itself as a progressive deification of the faithful in the Church by the action of the Holy Spirit. It is a life in the Holy Spirit through Christ to the Father. Christian life is always a question of the gradual building up of the *bios* in the *Logos*, that is to say, living according to Christ. Since the moral life of Christians is essentially a life in Christ, Christian ethics is a branch of knowledge whose proper object is 'life in Christ'.

Contemporary literature in moral theology, both catholic and orthodox, speaks extensively of a 'theology of Christian living' as a life centred in Christ. This 'life in Christ' necessarily includes also its trinitarian and pneumatological dimensions. We should also not forget that this life in Christ has its ecclesial

dimensions as well. The Christian moral life is not merely an 'individualistic ethics' but an 'ecclesial experience of the life of faith'.

1.2.3. A UNIFIED VISION OF THE SOURCES OF MORAL THEOLOGY

A unified vision of theology is primarily an Eastern characteristic, while compartmentalisation is that of the West. J. Meyendorff observes, "a tendency to compartmentalise, to establish borders between knowledge and spiritual experience, between doctrine and mystical vision, is seen in the Western world, in spite of all its genius". Eastern theology, developed by the Greek and Syriac fathers, in general is committed to preserving the whole of tradition as guided by the Holy Spirit, recorded in the Bible, taught especially by the general councils and celebrated in worship and icons.

Since the Christian life is a 'life in Christ', moral considerations emerge from all contexts and forms of Christian experience and expressions of faith: from the commentaries of sacred scripture, collections or anthologies of patristic texts, from the canons of councils and synods, from theological and apologetical works, apothegmas of the spiritual masters of the desert, monastic rules, the spiritual writings of the fathers, from the icons, hagiographic narrations as well as from the liturgical texts. Moral considerations are found in the entire living tradition of the Church, in which scripture is also lived and interpreted, in the faith and life of the fathers of the Church and in the liturgical life of the whole church.

Such a unified vision of the sources of moral reflections is especially seen in orthodox

moral theology. Commenting on Byzantine theology, J. Meyendorff says:

“Actually one can hardly find in the entire religious literature of Byzantium, any systematic treatment of Christian Ethics or behaviour but rather innumerable examples of moral exegesis of scripture and ascetical treatises on prayer and spirituality. This implies that Byzantine ethics were eminently ‘theological ethics’. The basic affirmation that every man, whether Christian or not, is created according to the image of God and therefore called to divine communion and deification was of course recognised but no attempt was ever made to build a secular (rational) ethics for man in general.”

A unified vision of the sources of moral theology is gaining importance in catholic circles as well. In theological studies, Vatican II calls for a unified vision of the sources of theology (OT, 16; GS, 5, 46, 62). In the words of B. Häring, ‘the reintegration of dogmatic theology and moral theology’ or ‘the oneness of theology’ would be one of the best means for our own integration and for the reintegration of the different parts of Christianity in the one Church.

This unified vision of moral theology, we hope, is also in full conformity with the Indian thought. The Sanskrit rendering of ethics is interesting and illuminative. There are two terms generally employed to mean ethics. They are *dharmasāstras* and *nitisāstras*. The term *dharma* comes from the Sanskrit root *dhr* meaning ‘that which holds together’ or ‘that which supports’. The word *niti* comes from the root word in Sanskrit *ni* meaning ‘to lead’. *Sāstra* means ‘science’. Therefore ethics is that science which holds people together and that

which leads people to their destination. We firmly believe that only a holistic approach to God, man and cosmos paves the right way for an authentic moral theology in its full sense.

1.2.4. THE LITURGICO-SACRAMENTAL CHARACTER OF THE MORAL LIFE

The liturgico-sacramental character of the moral life is also an essential characteristic of the Eastern tradition. The profound unity that exists between sacraments and moral life is now generally accepted by all. The Christian moral life, namely, life in Christ, is born of and nurtured by the mysteries (sacraments) of the Church especially by the divine liturgy, in which ‘life in Christ’ manifests itself as a progressive ‘deification’ of the faithful by the grace of the Holy Spirit. In the East, liturgy is perceived as the most important means for the realisation of this divinisation. Being sanctified by the sacraments and prayer, in the liturgical celebrations of the Church, the faithful celebrates his Christian faith and moral life. In other words, liturgy is the expression and celebration of Christian moral living in the concrete context of day to day life, which is the fountain and summit of the Church’s activities and Christian life (SC, 9-10; VS, 21; CCC, 2031).

Besides, each liturgical celebration of the Church is also a ‘moral catechesis’ to the life of faith for the faithful. It has also a pedagogical value in forming the moral conscience of the faithful through its signs and symbols. Vatican II very strongly reminds us of the educative and pastoral nature of the liturgical celebrations (SC, 33-35). The Christian moral life is understood more explicitly in the context of the Christian

community and in its liturgy with its formative narratives of salvation history. Worship and the moral life are not two distinct realities but are closely interrelated.

Hence there is a liturgical foundation for the Christian moral life and there exists a 'liturgical ethos' and a 'sacramental ethos', a Christian responsibility to the salvific initiative of God. As says B. Petrà, "the truths of moral life is ultimately a cultural and liturgical truth: man fulfils the full sense of his vocation when he does the priestly action through which every thing, every space, every time is led again to the form and truth of the kingdom of God, which is an eternal celebration of the glories of God the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit". Liturgy is the paradigm of Christian identity and commitment. It is in such a context that C. Aerath speaks of liturgy as the post-figurative, pre-figurative and co-figurative ethos of the people of God. The Christian tradition has long expressed the profound relationship between prayer/liturgy and belief/theology in terms of the normative principle *Lex orandi, lex credendi*: the law of prayer establishes the law of faith and vice versa. Hence we can say that liturgy is the fulcrum around which the whole Christian moral life moves. Thus the traditional principle of theology could also be further expanded to include the *lex vivendi*; thus we can say *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*.

1.2.5. THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL BASIS OF MORAL NOTIONS

Eastern moral theology strives to identify itself with the ontology of salvation and the personalisation of man into Christ and therefore naturally endeavours to converge decisively with anthropology as well. Its moral

theological reflections present various dogmatic and anthropological presuppositions of life in Christ, the central idea of which is the concept of man as 'icon of the Icon' (OL, 15), as created in the image of Christ, who is the perfect image of God. Eastern theology understands moral life in terms of the image of God. Being moral means to be conformed to the image and likeness of God.

An holistic and medicinal approach to man and his salvation is also a dominant theme in Eastern anthropology and moral theology. The history of salvation is understood as a gradual process of healing, an ongoing act of divinisation. It is a progressive therapeutic process, a restorative action realised by Christ, the divine physician of body and soul. It is a gradual becoming aware of the dignity of our own human existence as the living image of God, a gradual spiritualization of both body and soul. Salvation is the integral reconstruction of man into the harmony of being. Thus, for the Eastern way of thinking, the process of salvation is a gradual therapeutic and divinising process, animated and guided by the Holy Spirit in the ecclesial and liturgical context.

The deification of man (*theosis*) is also a key concept in Eastern anthropology, spirituality and moral theology. It is the purpose of life in Christ. Each and every human being is called by God to a life in Christ, to a life of communion with the Triune God and to a participation in the divine life. Man as the moral subject of the call of God, responds personally and freely to this call in the very context of his life. Already created in the image and likeness of God, we are called by grace to share in the divine life, to

become God-like. *Theosis* is participation in the divine life by the action of the Holy Spirit, making us similar to him. In other words, he deifies us. God makes us partners in his very life. *Theosis* is living the image of God, by avoiding evil and doing good. Here man becomes transformed in God.

1.2.6. ECCLESIASTICAL ECONOMY (OIKONOMIA) AS A MORAL ATTITUDE OF THE EASTERN MIND

This is also an important notion in Eastern theology, especially in the moral, canonical and pastoral praxis. Etymologically, it is derived from the Greek term, *oikonomia*, which means 'house law' or 'house management'. This term in general denotes the sum total of God's saving plan for humankind, revealed through creation and above all through the redemption, effected in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit (Eph, 1: 10, 3: 9). In Eastern theology, it also denotes the concessions to human weaknesses made by the Church, which in particular cases dispenses the faithful from the strict observance of the canonical prescriptions.

The attitude of *oikonomia* is not something exceptional or extraordinary in nature but an attitude which regulates the conduct of Church members and ministers. In view of the greater good of the faithful and without increasing the evil, the pastor is called to look at the moral norms and human frailties. B. Petrà explains ecclesiastical economy as 'a virtuous habit, that attitude of prudence and measure, which shrinks from excess, namely from the oblivion of reality and from the forgetfulness of truth, as well as tending to come close to the ideal, as far as possible within the limits of a reality, marked by sin'. He relates the

origin of this term to classical Greek and to the Greek fathers and especially to the Byzantine culture. He speaks of two possible meanings of the term *oikonomia*: i. theological: the whole salvific plan of God, fulfilled in Christ ii. ecclesiastical: the canonical approach of condescendence and mercy which is different from that of *akribeia* that denotes precision and rigour in the application of punishments. E. Farrugia calls this *oikonomia* 'a practico-pastoral sense of Christian balance and a model for resolving ethical issues'. M. Arranz defines *oikonomia* as an 'application of the canons together with a pastoral prudence'.

Far from an arbitrary application of the law, *oikonomia* seeks to imitate the concrete and condescending love of God for man. The Greek terms *akribeia* and *oikonomia* summarise the spirit of Eastern Canon Law and pastoral praxis. Speaking about the ethical relevance of ecclesiastical economy, B. Petrà argues for a healthy balance between *akribeia* and *oikonomia*. It is a difficult task to measure rightly the concrete reality and the ideal vision, the real possibility and the ideal norm, the wounded man and the ideal of perfect health. However it is an art of mercy and of divine condescendence. It is only in such a theological and anthropological background that ecclesiastical economy has any ethical significance. S. Harakas points out the profound sense of the fallen nature of man and the compassion and love of God as important characteristics of the Oriental ethos. The healing dimension of the sacrament of repentance, seen clearly in the Eastern traditions, constitutes a particular application of Oriental ecclesiastical economy. Therefore it is true to say that the ethical reflections in

the East are more familial than juridical or legal in character. Hence we see in the East a love based ethics rather than a law based morality and this, we understand, is more faithful to the spirit of the Sacred Scripture.

2. THE MORAL VISION OF THE EAST SYRIAC TRADITION: A PARADIGM FOR AN EASTERN APPROACH TO CATHOLIC MORAL THEOLOGY

After having made a general presentation of the relevance and characteristic features of Eastern moral thinking, we now concentrate on the East Syriac tradition proper. Here we discuss some pertinent features of its moral theological reflections. As was common in the early Christian tradition, so also among the Syriac Christians there was hardly any possibility of having developed concepts of morality as we think of them today. They were in a different cultural and theological milieu. However we see several moral instructions and counsels, linked to biblical exegesis and liturgical commentaries. More moral theological terms can be found in the later Syriac writers like Philoxenos of Mabbug (+523), Bar Salibi (12th century), Bar Hebraeus (+1286), 'Abdišo' (+1318), Timothy II (+1332), etc. owing to the gradual influence of Greek thinking and scholastic theology upon Syriac theology.

2.1. THE EAST SYRIAC UNDERSTANDING OF THE CHRISTIAN MORAL LIFE

Syriac Christianity was born and brought up in a community that placed great values on religious life and morality. The religious background of the Semitic and Mesopotamian worlds might have paved the way for the high religious values, seen in Syriac Christianity. P. Harb speaks of a gradual

development of moral notions in the Syriac tradition. The early Syriac Churches also saw the Christian life as a unified whole, as is common in other Eastern traditions. There was less classification and compartmentalisation. The dogmatic, spiritual, ascetical, canonical, moral or liturgical aspects of the Christian life are all interwoven in the one reality of life in Christ, Christ being its centre. Besides the general characteristics of the Eastern moral approaches that we have already seen briefly, we now speak of some of the characteristic features of Christian life in the Syriac tradition.

2.1.1. IMAGERIES OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISMAL LIFE

Syriac Churches have a rich theology of baptism. Syriac fathers usually combine both the Johannine vision of baptism as a rebirth and its Pauline symbolism of death and resurrection, thus providing a very rich understanding of the meaning of baptism. In the earliest texts, more prominence was given to the Johannine perspective and it is only from the late fourth century onwards that the Pauline perspective was given greater emphasis. Expressions like baptism 'washes away man's sins and transgressions', 'remits the sins', 'heals man's wounds', 'conveys the Holy Spirit', 'rejuvenates humankind', 'renews the lost image', 'makes us spiritual', 'heals our inner disease', etc. could frequently be seen in the early Syriac writings.

The Syriac tradition sees Christian baptismal life as a holy life, a life of betrothal to Christ. Aphrahat calls baptism 'a true interior circumcision' and a 'betrothal to Christ, the heavenly bridegroom'. St. Ephrem sees baptism as a 're-entry into or recovery of the

lost paradise' and as a 'betrothal to Christ'. In Christian baptism, the Christian himself goes down into the Jordan waters and from there he picks up and puts on the robe of glory, which Christ regained for us through his descent into the 'womb of the Jordan'. The robe of glory is regained in potential but not yet fully in reality, for, this will occur at the end of time, in the resurrection. This final reality can, to some extent, be anticipated in this life by the saints, who preserve their baptismal robe unspotted (Mt, 22: 1-14). At baptism, each Christian is betrothed to Christ, the heavenly bridegroom, the soul becoming the bride of Christ and the body, the bridal chamber.

Christian baptismal life is understood as a pure and holy life. The notion of holiness in the East Syriac tradition includes the aspects of a 'union' and a separation, union being man's nearness to or intimacy with God and separation, man's disposition of getting away from unholy life. The baptismal state of life is compared to life in paradise, the life of the angels (*bios angelikos*) and to the resurrection life. Among the Syriac writers, we also see plentifully the imagery of the Church as 'the new Israel', 'the holy nation', 'the holy people of God', 'new people of God', 'new wine trees planted in the vineyard of God'. Christian life is also seen, as a spiritual battle, a common imagery seen in the Syriac tradition. This idea is mostly seen in the *Demonstrations* of Aphrahat, in the context of the 'sons and daughters of the covenant'.

Also the East Syriac tradition understands Christian life as a life in Christ. It is very interesting to note Aphrahat's description of faith, seen in his *Demonstration on Faith*. Inspired

by 1Cor, 3: 11, he compares Christian faith to an edifice or building, which is being built up into perfection through various pieces of good works, while its foundation is placed on the firm rock, which is Christ. Christ is not only the foundation but also the indweller of the building. A person who becomes a dwelling place for Christ must see to what is fitting to the service of Christ. Aphrahat gives a long list of deeds of faith such as charity, purity, fasting, prayer, humility, moderation, patience, alms, penance, etc. which will please the dweller. He enumerates also the deeds that are contrary to the faith such as observance of hours, consultation of oracles, astrology and magic, fornication, vain doctrines, blasphemy, adultery, false witness, etc. Accordingly Aphrahat understands sin as a denial of faith.

2.1.2. PURITY OF HEART AS THE BASIC VIRTUE

The heart in Semitic thought is the principle of human integration. It sustains the energy of all the forces of body and soul. It is the source of human acts. The Syriac tradition inherited this biblical understanding of the heart as the spiritual centre of the human person. It is the focal point of the intellect, will as well as of the feelings. Accordingly there is no dichotomy between heart and mind as we often find in other Christian traditions.

The imagery of the heart as the 'bridal chamber' is frequently seen in the Syriac tradition. St. Ephrem speaks of a 'circumcised heart' and a 'bridal chamber of the heart'. Ephrem says, "With a circumcised heart, uncircumcision becomes holy; in the bridal chamber of such a person's heart, the creator resides". Each Christian is a bride of Christ.

At baptism each individual soul is betrothed to Christ the bridegroom (Jn, 3: 29; Mt, 9: 15; Mt, 22: 1-14; Mt, 25: 1-13), his heart being the bridal chamber and each celebration of the Qurbana, a wedding feast. St. Ephrem writes: "The soul is your bride, the body your bridal chamber. Your guests are the senses and thoughts. And if a single body is a wedding feast for you, how great is your banquet for the whole Church".

The Syriac Churches greatly emphasise 'purity of the heart' (*šapiūt lebba*) with a broad shade of meanings such as limpidity, lucidity, luminosity, clarity, purity, cleanness, straightness, transparency, serenity, or sincerity of heart. The *Odes of Solomon* qualifies purity of heart as a basic Christian virtue. In the *Acts of Thomas*, purity of heart is described as the only recompense for miracles of healing. Aphrahat recalls to mind that purity of heart is prayer and it is necessary so that fasting is accepted. Purity of heart is one of the attributes of the paradisiacal state and so its attainment is part of the continual quest in the life of the Christian to effect the reality of re-entry into paradise, granted in potential at baptism. The expressions 'purity of heart', 'pure heart', 'pure thoughts', etc. are seen several times in the liturgical prayers of the Syriac Churches.

The interior liturgical role of the heart is also emphasised in Syriac literature. Some of the Syriac writings speak of an 'inner altar' of the 'hidden Church of the heart'. For example, *Liber Graduum*, a late 4th century or early 5th century anonymous Syriac work, in its chapter XII discusses the three altars of the 'Church visible, hidden and heavenly'. The interior altar needs to function in harmony with the visible altar of the visible Church and with the

heavenly altar of the heavenly Church. The heart is the hidden altar, inside the sanctuary, constituted of the body and on this altar, the interior offering of prayer is being continuously made.

Syriac tradition also speaks of 'interior virginity', the virginity of the free will, as important as or even more important than physical virginity. The spiritual value of the exterior aspect of virginity, morally neutral in itself, depends on the interior aspect of chastity of heart and on the aspect of virginity as a state of betrothal to Christ the heavenly bridegroom. The possibility of betrothal to Christ is not confined to religious alone, even though the imagery could be exploited to its fullest with them. As we have already seen, every Christian is a bride of Christ, the bridegroom, betrothed to him at baptism and his body and heart, the bridal chamber.

2.1.3. ASCETICAL LIFE STYLE

Early Syriac Christianity in all its manifestations was based on strong ascetical tendencies, known especially for its enthusiasm for virginity. Asceticism was a dominant feature of Christian life in the Syriac tradition and was a power house for the flourishing of the ecclesial life. Research studies copiously done on this dimension of the Syriac tradition unanimously confirm this fact. As R. Murray says, no other characteristics are likely to strike a modern reader more immediately than its asceticism, moderate or extreme, dominating or at least colouring almost all the literature. After having made a detailed study of the various forces and structures in the development of early Syriac theology, H. J. W. Drijvers observes: "They have one thing in common: a strong emphasis on asceticism,

the command of the body and its passions in order to create room for the divine spirit, truth and wisdom."

As we have just seen, the early Syriac tradition has inherited a more genuine Semitic thinking. Hence some of the characteristics of the Semitic mind could naturally be seen in Syriac theology. One important aspect among them is the ascetical life style, which is widely seen in Semitic culture and in Judeo-Christian theology. The early Christians of the Syriac world were probably familiar with the various ascetical trends seen in later Judaism and among different groups like the Essene communities of Qumran, the Manicheans, Gnostics, Encratites, etc. Here the observation of K. McVey is worth mentioning. She says:

"Certainly one fact agreed upon by scholars is that early Syriac Christianity in all its manifestations, seems to have been based on strong ascetical tendencies. It was this same asceticism that underlies the Encratism of Tatian, the asceticism of Mani and the absolute sexual renunciation demanded by the *Acts of Thomas*. This ascetic tendency affected not only the fringe sects but also exerted a strong influence on the mainline community. It is in this nebulous period at the beginning of the fourth century that the figure of St. Ephrem appears."

An ascetical life style is always suggested as the means for a holy life. The thinking that fasting cleanses us from the filth of the body and prayer from the filth of soul is a very strong theme in the early Syriac writings. The free will of man is a strong theme in the Syriac theology. Syriac theologians very often speak of the need of discipline of the body and heart, self-control, modesty and temperance.

This is very clear in Ephrem when he speaks about the power of human freedom in correcting the perverted will, in dominating the lust of sensual pleasures and in overcoming Satan, evil and destiny. The regaining of the original state of harmony through the right use of mind and will and through various ascetical practices is frequently seen in Syriac literature. H. J. W. Drijvers testifies, "The doctrine of the free will of man which can control all his passions and guide his body is an essential part of all forms of theology in the Syrian area, however different these may be".

Speaking about the spirituality of Syriac speaking Christians, R. C. Bondi points to a kind of strong individualism and primitive asceticism of the Early Syriac period. However this individualism did not always have to do with mere personal religious experience but was to assume a special responsibility for society. So also the rude and severe asceticism of the early period later turned to a moderate practice to bring it in line with the Christian affirmation of the goodness of creation. Syriac asceticism was not merely negative but positive. S. Brock observes:

"Far from being the outcome of a dualistic world view and a negative attitude to the body, these ascetic ideals in fact imply a very biblical and positive attitude towards the human person as body cum soul, with great value attached to the sanctity of the body and emphasis laid on the interpenetration of the physical and spiritual worlds... Marriage was equally seen as a state whose truly sacred character was something which wife and husband should constantly strive to establish. Moreover it is important to remember that

those who chose the life of virginity here on earth were by no means rejecting marriage as something inferior but only postponing it to the eschaton when the wedding feast with Christ the bridegroom would take place, for at baptism the soul had been betrothed to Christ."

Thus Ephrem was far removed from the dualistic tendencies that sought to denigrate the value of the human body. The starting point for his own positive attitude was the fact that the body is part of God's creation and should not be despised. There is nothing unclean or unworthy about the human body because it is the temple of the Triune God; besides, God 'puts on our body' and allows his own body and blood (the Holy Eucharist) to be consumed by human bodies. For him, body and soul are equally important and the body provides the bridal chamber, where the bride, the soul, meets Christ, the heavenly bridegroom.

It is true that Aphrahat and Ephrem praised and appreciated marriage but since their enthusiasm was for ascetical celibacy and renunciation of marital sexual relation, we see in them generally a preference for virginity over marriage. Both Aphrahat and Ephrem speak very highly of 'virginity' (btulutâ) and 'holiness' (qadišutâ). This has led some modern scholars to suppose that they held a very low view of sexuality and marriage. S. Brock argues that this interpretation is extremely misguided and finds no support in what Aphrahat and Ephrem actually say. For them, the ideals of virginity and holiness were 'periods of preparation' (Ex, 19: 9-15; Gen, 7-8) and this provides a pointer to one of the main motivating forces which led people to

undertake these ascetic views at baptism, namely, the concept of Christ as the heavenly bridegroom. This ideal of virginity was seen as a concomitant of betrothal to the heavenly bridegroom to serve him with 'single mindedness' of life.

As R. Murray says the ascetical life style of the Syriac Churches reflects the eschatological character of the Christian life, the passionate longing for the 'heavenly bridegroom and heavenly bridal chamber' that had characterised most of the Judeo-Christian literature. The Church looks for fulfilment in the eschatological kingdom or paradise. This eschatological and paschal orientation is especially clear in the Oriental tradition. The very outlook of a Christian is eschatological, looking forward to the second coming of Jesus. The eastern and the early Christian tradition of praying facing the East and the liturgical posture of standing that manifests the pilgrim character of the people of God, show the eschatological orientation of Christian life.

2.1.4. SACRAMENTAL CHARACTER OF THE CREATED WORLD

Syriac theology expresses a profound awareness of the sacramental character of the created world and of the potential of everything in it to act as witnesses and pointers to the creator. In the *Hymns on Paradise*, Ephrem speaks of the natural world as standing side by side with scripture as a witness to God (5: 2, 6: 1). In the *Hymns on Virginity*, he says that the music of the revelation of Christ is played on three harps; the OT, the NT and nature (27-30). Nature and the Bible testify to God by means of the symbols and types, which they contain (HVirg, 20: 12).

Nothing in the universe stands in isolation. St. Ephrem considers the universe as a *totum* and *continuum*. By demonstrating the inherent interconnectedness within the humanity, within the creation and between the material and spiritual worlds, St. Ephrem is different from those Christian writers who, usually under neoplatonic influence, tend to denigrate the value of the material world. According to him, it is moral evil, which is the misuse of free will on man's part that disturbs cosmic order and harmony. On the other hand, the exercise of human justice through right choices of free will and through the right use of creation brings harmony and order to creation and to society.

Thus man's attitude to and use of the natural world, which are to be governed by the right exercise of free will, is of fundamental importance for St. Ephrem. For him, the right attitude and response to nature and its resources are essentially one of wonder, admiration, adoration, love, respect and gratitude, whereas the wrong response will be one of greed, lust, contempt and arrogance. The right response, moreover, will always be coupled with the awareness of the divine that is inherent in the natural world as in scripture, so that the inner eye of faith can use it as a vehicle for a deeper understanding of the spiritual realities. The sacramental vision of Syriac theology on the cosmos proposes a sound theology on ecology, which is a widely discussed theme in contemporary moral theology. Besides, the aesthetic dimension has become one of the characteristic features of post-modern culture.

2.1.5. HEALING IMAGERIES RELATED TO THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

In the early East Syriac tradition, we see a beautiful galaxy of rich biblical and theological imageries. Most important among them is that of healing. The Syriac fathers speak of the healing imagery in a multifarious sense, relating it to the various aspects of salvation history and Christian life such as revelation, faith, scripture, nature, baptism, the Holy Eucharist, prayer, moral laws and commandments, repentance, penitential acts like fasting and alms-giving, practice of virtues like purity of heart, humility, etc.

Amidst the various healing imageries, the healing imagery of repentance and forgiveness of sins is very particular in the Syriac tradition. In the Syriac patristic view, we see a thoroughly biblical view of sin and forgiveness. Instead of a juridical conceptual model, which tends to dominate the post-patristic Western tradition, the Syriac writers prefer to use a medical conceptual model, where sin is seen more as a wound or a state of sickness that is in need of healing; the medicine which can effect this healing is repentance and penitence. Christ the good physician of souls has transmitted the healing power of forgiveness in the Church to his apostles and to the priests after them. This healing is experienced in a special way in the sacrament of repentance. The emphasis on Christ as the healer is of particular significance for the early Syriac understanding of penance.

CONCLUSION

We have been trying to bring out the possible theological relevance of the Eastern and East Syriac approaches to Catholic moral theology. Since the Church of Christ

manifests herself equally in her Eastern and Western traditions, we need to appreciate the theological genius and wisdom of both East and West. Such a theological attitude leaves space for an Eastern approach to moral theology as well. Just as the East has made unique contributions to the various areas of theology, we see that it has a unique moral vision as well. This is an area in which more theological studies are to come forward. We have analysed some of the important characteristics of the Eastern moral approach. Then we have concentrated on the East Syriac tradition, one of the equally important three streams of theology in the Christian tradition. We have also seen some of its pertinent characteristics and unique concepts of the Christian moral life. The hidden pearls of the East Syriac moral theological reflections are to be re-discovered still further.

The Semitic roots and Hellenistic growth of Christianity are undeniable facts. Together with the Greek and Latin traditions, the Syriac Orient also shares the Hellenistic aspect. However the Semitic dimension is a unique prerogative of the early Syriac period. It does not mean that the Syriac, Greek and Latin traditions are rivals, each contending for

primacy; rather we should understand each tradition as complementing the others. All too often in the past, one tradition has tried to dominate the others, thus creating a serious imbalance and impoverishment of the Christian tradition. Each tradition needs to recognise the value of other traditions and thus be enriched by them. Needless to say, the coming together of Western and Eastern traditions should result in the enrichment of both traditions, rather than the dominion of the one at the expense of the other. I conclude this very short study, citing from the article of S. Brock that I already have mentioned at the beginning of this inquiry: "The loving gaze of the three angels (in the icon the Trinity by Rublev) has a circular motion from one angel to the next. It is precisely this trinitarian model of the loving gaze of the three angels that I would suggest that we need to have when we look at the three fold heritage of the Latin West, Greek East and Syriac orient to which the church in the twenty-first century is the heir".

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Eastern Christian Monasticism: A Symbolic Synthesis of Christianity and A Reference Point for All People

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Introduction:

The Decrees of Vatican II, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* (on the Catholic Eastern Churches) and *Unitatis Redintegratio* (on Ecumenism) have highlighted the importance of Eastern Monasticism in the formation and development of the theology, liturgy and spirituality of the Oriental Churches. The Decree on Ecumenism gives emphatic reference to the need and unique place of Monasticism in the Oriental Churches. "Moreover in the East are to be found the riches of those spiritual traditions which are given expression in monastic life especially".¹ His Holiness Pope John Paul II has always held in high esteem this venerable heritage of Eastern Monasticism and recognised its vital importance in the life of the Church and modern world. The Apostolic Letters *Vita Consecrata* and *Oriente Lumen* give ample evidence to his deep appreciation for this form of life in the Church. "From the first centuries of the Church, men and women have felt called to imitate the Incarnate Word who took on the condition of a servant. They

have sought to follow him by living in a particularly radical way, through monastic profession the demands flowing from baptismal participation in the Paschal Mystery of his death and resurrection. In this way by becoming bearers of the cross (*Staurophoroi*) they have striven to become bearers of the spirit (*Pneumatophoroi*), authentically spiritual men and women, capable of endowing history with hidden fruitfulness by unceasing praise and intercession, by spiritual counsels and works of charity".²

In *Oriente Lumen*, the Pope presents monasticism 'as the highest point a person can reach, that sensitivity, culture and spirituality are able to express'.³ And he further points out that monasticism was an essential experience for the Eastern Churches and it is still flourishing in them. "Monasticism has always been the very soul of the Eastern Churches and was an integral part of the Eastern Lumen passed on to the West Church".⁴ While presenting Monasticism as a fundamental aspect of Eastern Churches' life the Pope emphasizes the fact that in the East

1. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 15.

2. *Vita Consecrata*, 6.

3. *Oriente Lumen*, 9.

4. Ibid.

monasticism was presented as a Symbolic Synthesis of Christianity and a Reference Point for all People.

"In the East monasticism was not seen merely as a separate condition proper to a precise category of Christians but as a reference point for all the baptized according to the gifts offered to each by the Lord; it was presented as a Symbolic Synthesis of Christianity".⁵

This aspect of Eastern Monasticism as 'Symbolic Synthesis of Christianity' and a 'Reference Point for All' is of special significance for all the members of Eastern Catholic Churches whether they are priests, religious or lay people. It is already an aspect of their baptismal vocation. People of other religions also consider the monastic vision as an integral part of human nature and they give it a monastic dimension which is expressed through the terms 'Homo Monasticus and Femina Monastica'. It is in this specific perspective that some of the important features of Eastern monasticism are presented in this article.

A Christian Lay Movement

When we study the history of Christian monasticism which appeared towards the end of 3rd century, one could understand that it originated as a consequence of the efforts made by the ascetically oriented Christians who wanted to have a more perfect form of Christian life. Eventually it became a state of

life in the Church with its own rules, structures and institutions. In the beginning it was a manner of life available to any Christian who wanted to live and give witness to Christ and his teachings⁶. Historians would show some connection between the end of the period of martyrdom in the Church and the origin of Christian monastic movement. The early Christian spirituality is characterised by its special devotion to martyrdom as it is witnessed by the abundance of literature on martyrdom on those times.⁷ Martyrs were considered as true imitators and perfect followers of Christ and martyrdom was the supreme means to attain God and it was the expression of perfect charity.⁸ As a result of this deep conviction there was a strong desire among those Christians to accept martyrdom.

This period of persecution did not last long and the fervent Christians began to think about a substitute for martyrdom. Although martyrdom was a way of supreme witness to Christ there were men and women who dedicated their life totally to live the Gospel as perfectly as possible which they considered as a life equal to that of martyrdom. In the aftermath of the end of the period of persecution as the Christians became more and more 'worldly' and 'secular', the zealous Christians who took their Christian faith seriously began to lead an exemplary form of life by practising the Gospel precepts as closely as possible. These people led a celibate life, sold their property and distributed it to the poor, dedicated themselves for the service

5. Ibid.

6. J. Auman, *History of Spirituality*, Manila, 1979, p. 35

7. L. Bouyer, *History of Spirituality*, Vol. I, New York, 1963, p. 190-192.

8. Ibid, p. 197-98.

of the Christian communities around them, followed a simple and rigorous form of life and thus kept a certain distance from the profane way of life. Because of such a life style they came to be called Ascetics. The number of these ascetics went on increasing and they were officially recognised by the Christian communities and there evolved an organised form of life among them. Their life was identified with the life of the martyrs and the local Christians believed that the spirit of martyrdom was surviving and continuing in the Church through these ascetics. By the end of 3rd century there were many such ascetics of both sexes who enjoyed special positions and great influence and they became a force to be reckoned with. As part of a new evolution due to a decrease in fervour and enthusiasm within this form of life, many zealous ascetics separated themselves from the world and the circumstances in which they lived with a desire and strong will to live their ascetical life in its fullness and in an uncompromising manner according to the teachings of the Gospel. They went into the deserts, mountains and other solitary places without having much contact with others. They have interpreted this phenomenon as an irreversible exodus with Jesus. This new way of life was later came to be called in the Church as Monastic Life. Thus monastic life originated in the form of anchoritism (solitary life) was later developed into coenobitism (communal form of life) with its specific structures and organisations.

Therefore one could say that it was Christian asceticism essentially rooted in Christian principles, which was a necessary institution for those who wanted to realise radically the authentic ideals of Christ himself, has prepared the rise of monasticism.⁹ This new way of life started by the enthusiastic Christians under the guidance of the Holy Spirit was a reaction to a world in which they were to become its slaves in a changed situation in the Church after the time of persecution. St. John Chrysostom asserted that monasteries were necessary because the world was not Christian; let it be converted and the need for the monastic separation will disappear.¹⁰

It was a movement initiated and continued by the ordinary Christians in a situation under which they were challenged, not by persecution but by the world in which they were living, to live their Christian faith perfectly. Dom Germain Morin considers the origin of monastic life as an apparent paradox. "It is not so much the monastic life which was a novelty at the end of the 3rd and the beginning of the 4th, but rather the life of adaptation to the world led by the mass of Christians at the time when the persecutions ceased. The monks actually did nothing but preserve intact, in the midst of altered circumstances, the ideal of the Christian life of early days".¹¹

Therefore one could clearly conclude that monastic life was originated as a purely Christian lay movement and was later recognised by the Church as a status of life within it, Living the Gospel to the fullest

9. Ibid, p. 301.

10. P. Evdomikov, *The Struggle with God*, New Jersey, 1966, p. 113.

11. Dom Germain Morin, *L'ideal monastique et la vie Chretienne des premiers jours*, Paris, 1921.

The real motivation behind monastic way of life was the desire to follow Christ by living perfectly according to the Gospel. It was the Gospel alone heard and taken literally by the simple Christians in Egypt, Syria and other different Christian centres that gave rise to monasticism in the new conditions of the Church. It was evident from the life of the Ascetics who wanted to live the Gospel radically as a substitute for martyrdom. The lives and sayings of the early monks (Apophthegmata Patrum), who were known as Desert Fathers, were steeped in the letter and spirit of Sacred Scriptures, especially of the Gospel.¹² In the 'Life of St. Antony', who was known as Father of monasticism, the recurring theme is the life of a monk as a total conformity to the Sacred Scripture. His life is interwoven with biblical quotations. "He was so attentive to its reading that nothing from Sacred Scripture escaped him", and "his memory took the place of books" says his biographer St. Athanasios.¹³

The Pachomian monastic Rules are called "Rules according to the Scripture" which expresses his vision of monastic life as a life focussed on Sacred Scripture and its practical application in daily life. There shall be no one in the monastery who does not learn to read and memorise something of the Sacred Scripture. It was not enough to memorise the Sacred Scripture but it was important to understand it well so that it could nourish their day today life.¹⁴

The lives of the Syrian and Palestinian monks were even more Bible oriented and was totally nourished by the Bible because of their nearness to the land of the Bible and their consciousness that they are living there.¹⁵ St. Basil, who is known as Father and Legislator of Eastern Monasticism, considers monastic life "as a life according to the Gospel". His famous monastic Rules are only the practical application of the Gospel and the Sacred Scripture as a whole to the issues of day today life. Basilian Rules are often interpreted as impersonal in character because "the author effaces himself in order to show that the sole authority for his monastic precepts and instructions is Holy Bible. Bible is the foundation upon which all monastic legislation is to rest. Scripture is to be the only Rule and the life of a monk is to be truly evangelical".¹⁶

This eagerness and enthusiasm to think and to live according to the Gospel can be found in all the Fathers early or late and in their rules that had an impact on monastic life or who were monks themselves. Later monastic reformers also insisted on the fact that returning to the Gospel and living it fully is the basis of any monastic reform. The practical application of taking the Gospel seriously and living it to the fullest is manifested in the monastic observances. The monastic observances and daily practices like silence, asceticism, chastity, poverty, obedience, brotherly love, hospitality, manual work,

12. Marcel Driot, *Father of the Desert*, Quernsey, 1992, p. 113-125.3

13. St. Athanasius, *Life of St. Antony and the letter of Marcellinus*, SPCK, 1980, p.124.

14. William Skudlark (ed.), *The Continuing quest for God*, Minnesota, 1981, p.62-63.

15. A. Boniface, *Eastern Monasticism and the future of the Church*, Stanford, CT, 1993, p.68.

16. E.F. Morison, *Basil and his Rule*, London, 1912, p. 20; R.T. Smith, *St. Basil the Great*, London, 1879, p. 212.

pastoral and charitable works etc. have their basis in the radical evangelical attitude. In this way Gospel becomes the paramount vision of their life and their life and activity are totally geared to the message of the Gospel by which these monks prove to the world and the Church that the Gospel can be lived even today and that the Gospel is worth living and it is worth even dying for it.¹⁷

Faithfulness to Tradition

Through the monastic Fathers the Gospel has passed into traditions of the Church. Eastern Monasticism is a real heir of the apostolic community and of the Fathers. The primitive Christian community grouped around the apostles presents many quasi-monastic characteristics. Therefore it was traditionally maintained that monastic life is only the continuation of the "Apostolic life" in the Church.¹⁸

Apostolic life is meant a life according to the text of the Acts, in the sense of a life in which the whole group of believers had but one heart and one soul; everything was held in common and remained faithful to the teaching of the Apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.

Therefore whenever the historians talk about the origin of the monasticism, they always refer to that powerful 'nostalgia' of monasticism for the early Church of the

Apostles. The principal expression of this was the wish to take up 'apostolic life' that is say the Christian mentality communicated by the Apostles to the early Church and lived by them. This is not surprising if it is remembered that the early monks were convinced of the universality of the formula of Christian life described in the Acts.¹⁹ In this way tradition always establishes a link between the origin of monastic life and the apostolic community in Jerusalem, such as it is portrayed in the Acts of the Apostles. (Acts 2: 44-46, 4: 32)²⁰

Eastern monasticism takes tradition seriously and shows its important application in the life style. It is from Church's tradition that monasticism draws its faithfulness and continuity with teaching of Christ and his Church. As Tradition is rooted in Christ and his Gospel, so monasticism is rooted in Gospel and Tradition in its principles and daily observances. Monastic observances are practised in the context of Tradition "from which it draws its everlasting youthfulness, its unwavering faithfulness and its continuity with the teachings of Christ and his Church, which enable monasticism to adapt its secondary features without losing its soul: the core of Christianity".²¹

Together with hierarchy monasticism is the carrier and defender par excellence of the Tradition. Continuity with the Gospel and Apostolic tradition was the basic norm and

17. A. Boniface, *Eastern Monasticism*, p. 66

18. L. Bouyer, *History of Spirituality*, p. 303-304; Dom Jean Leclercq, *The perfect life*, Liturgical Press, 1961.4

19. M.H. Vicaire, *The Apostolic life*, tr. W.De Naple, Chicago, 1966, p.29-31.

19. M. Driot, *Fathers of the Desert*, p. 11.

20. A. Boniface, *Eastern Monasticism*, p. 66.

21. *Oriente Lumen*, 10.

character of Eastern Monasticism. Through monasticism Fathers have shown to the whole Church, the importance and possibility of living the Gospel seriously and the faithful application of the Tradition in its life.

Worship centred Life:

Liturgical life occupied the central position of the monastic system. The monks spent most of their time and attention for worship along with their personal prayer and remained always faithful as the praising heart of the Church. Pope John Paul II has significantly stated that "monasticism shows in a special way that life is suspended between two poles; the Word of God and the Eucharist".²² The relationship between Word of God and worship in the life of a monk is explained in the following way. "Even while he chants with his brothers the prayer that sanctifies time, he continues his assimilation of the Word. The very liturgical hymnody of which all the Churches of the Christian East can be justly proud is but the continuation of the Word which is read, understood, assimilated and finally sung".²³

The Pope also gives special reference to the centrality of Eucharist in the liturgical life of a monk. "Eucharist is the culmination of the prayer experience, the other pole where Word becomes Flesh and Blood, a heavenly experience where this becomes an event".²⁴ By actively participating in the liturgy, especially

in the Eucharistic liturgy, which reveals the eschatological nature of his life and a living sign of this expectation, "the monk continues and brings to fulfilment in the liturgy, the invocation of the Church, the Bride who implores the Bridegroom's return in a 'Maranatha' constantly repeated not only in words but in the whole of his life."²⁵

In the Eastern liturgical prayers and celebrations, "the involvement of the person in his/her totality" and "the gradual identification with the mystery celebrated with one's whole person" is always given special attention.²⁶ And this is fully true in the liturgical life of a monk. The monks really interiorise the liturgy through their intense personal prayer and make worship a deep personal event and experience. In the words of Archimandrite Boniface, "it would be difficult to appreciate enough this contribution by monks to Christian worship, this interiorisation of liturgy through strong personal prayerfulness, that made it a deep personal event and the main vehicle for Christian formation and especially for Eastern spirituality."²⁷ Recitation of Psalms was an important aspect of the prayer and worship among the early monks. They have left a valuable legacy of Psalter to all the monks of the East and West and even to the whole Church. Monks have been mostly the authors of Church's liturgical compositions and prayers. Divine Office is an incomparable and inexhaustible treasury of the monastic

22. Ibid.5

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid, 11

26. A. Boniface, *Eastern Monasticism*, p. 112

27. R. Taft SJ, *The Liturgy of Hours in the East and the West*, Collegeville, MN-56321, 1985, p. 56-91

Fathers.²⁸ These prayers were formulated from the depth of their spiritual experience and theological insights. Their liturgical celebration was the outcome of profound ecclesial life and patristic thoughts. The early monks put the best of their spirituality in the worship especially in the Liturgy of the Hours and Eucharist. Their liturgical prayer life was not a mere individualistic, sentimental and emotional fulfilment but it was something deeper penetrating one's whole being and affecting his daily life and activities. This spirit of liturgical prayer awakened in them a strong ecclesial sense, a strong sense of the Church.

Deeply Contemplative and Eschatological

Eastern monasticism, which is basically contemplative in character give witness to the deeper dimensions of the Church especially to her contemplative and eschatological nature. Eastern monasticism always played this paradigm function in the Church and remained the guarantor and model of Eastern Church's contemplative character through which she anticipates her eschatological and heavenly conditions.²⁹

Through contemplation the monk fulfils the obligation of constant prayer, adoration and thanksgiving to God and maintains within the soul the divine life of love. In contemplation the monk turns his gaze to Christ, God and man. "To the contemplative life Christ reveals himself as he did to the

women of Jerusalem who had gone up to contemplate the mysterious spectacle of Calvary. Trained in this school, the monks become accustomed to contemplating Christ in the hidden recess of creation and in the history of mankind, which is then understood from the standpoint of identification with the whole Christ.³⁰

This contemplation leads the monk to a constant process of conversion, by making him aware of his own sinfulness and his distance from the Lord and the urgency to come closer to him. Silence solitude and inner quiet strengthen the atmosphere of contemplation and they remain basic features of monastic life. Through this contemplative spirit monks are called upon to keep alive and deepen the intimate understanding and experience through which Divine Revelation is handed down not merely in Christian preaching but as a living experienced reality.³¹

Eastern monasticism through its contemplative character anticipates the eschatological, heavenly condition of the Church foreshadowing the future Kingdom. According to Vat.II monastic life "foretells the resurrected state and the glory of the heavenly kingdom".³² The monks always believed that they are strangers and foreigners in this world and here we have no lasting city (Heb. 13: 14) for our common wealth is in heaven (Phil. 3: 20) and one thing necessary is to seek God's kingdom and his righteousness (Mt.6: 33) with necessary prayer for the Lord's

28. A. Boniface, *Eastern Monasticism*, p.78-79.6

29. *Oriente Lumen*, 12.

30. Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action*, New York, 1973, p. 194.

31. *Lumen Gentium*, 44.

32. *Vita Consecrata*, 26.

coming.³³ Some of the radical attitudes and stance taken by the monks to this world and its realities demonstrate the eschatological dimension of monastic life.

The prophetic character of monasticism emerges from this eschatological dimension. It is the principal duty of a monk to witness to the eschatological tension of the Church and showing for the prophetic character of Christ.³⁴ even to a point of martyrdom.³⁵ This prophetic function always entails the affirmation of the primacy of God and eternal life. And this is very much expected from monastic life in the modern world and its circumstances.³⁶

Contemplative Action

History of monasticism clearly shows how the Eastern monks of different monastic traditions slowly entered into different activities of the Church without endangering the monastic atmosphere of prayer and contemplation. They could harmoniously combine the vertical and horizontal dimensions of their life. They were often called 'ambidextri', who could use both hands - contemplation and action - with equal dexterity, which gave their services a unique quality that could bring about great transformation in contemporary society in which they lived. The traditional maxim 'Contemplata aliis tradere' was the guiding principle of their monastic activities.

They have engaged in different activities. Manual labour was an integral part of monastic life system to which they gave ascetical and social dimensions and values besides its important place as a means of daily sustenance. The monks also made their mark on the pastoral and missionary fields of the Church through their sanctity, shining example, pneumatic gifts and spirit of martyrdom shown for the defence and propagation of faith.³⁷ Eastern monasticism always assumed a profound social character. Hospitality became a monastic virtue par excellence. The monks have shown deep concern for the poor, needy, sick and the oppressed and marginalised in the society and they have earned the titles 'the merciful', 'protectors of the poor and the oppressed' etc. through their social and charitable activities.³⁸ Monks made invaluable contributions to the treasury of intellectual culture through those intellectual activities like reading, writing, teaching, copying manuscripts, multiplying books and maintaining libraries in the monasteries.³⁹

In all these activities it was the contemplative experience of God in the following of Christ that stimulated and sustained these monks. Even at the peak of their activities and commitment they sought and situated their formal and efficient causes in the contemplation of God's love. In this level, action and contemplation are fused into one entity by the love of God and for our

33. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 9

35. *Vita Consecrata*, 86

36. *Ibid.*, 85.7

37. A. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient*, Vol.II, Louvain, 1960, p. 316-360.

38. *Ibid.* p. 361 -387; E.F. Morison, *St. Basil and his Rule*, p. 123-25; W. Skudlarek, *The Continuing Quest*, p. 78- 79; M. Driot, *Fathers of the Desert*, p. 83-109.

39. A. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism*, P. 388-414.

brethren in Christ without having any conflict or contradiction.⁴⁰

Brethren in Communion

Monastic life which is founded on the evangelical principles of love of God and neighbour finds its fullest expression in the monastic community where all co-operate and help each other in their pursuit after Christain perfection. With the emergence of the coenobitical form of life monastic fathers propagated community life proving theoretically and practically its superiority in the monastic scheme. The first Christian Community of the Acts was always the model of monastic community. Some of the important traits of the community life are common living space, common prayer, common meal, common work, uniformity of life, common rule and 'life under obedience' etc.⁴¹ Mutual love, care, concern, mutual forgiveness which are fruits of the union of souls were the pillars upon which community life was built.⁴² Authority, discipline, obedience also have played an important role in maintaining the communal spirit. Monastic Brotherhood is an eloquent sign of ecclesial communion and communion in the world. "The monk is always, essentially a man of communion witnessing to the communion of the persons in the Trinity".⁴³ The communion existing in the monastic brotherhood overflows into the ecclesial community and into the world. Monastic

charity practised and lived in the community finds its lust expression through the charitable activities of the monk.

Strong 'Sense of the Church'

The history of monasticism gives ample witness to the fact that monks by their very vocation always go back to the authentic sources of the Churches and give witness to her Traditions. All their monastic observances point to the eschatological dimension of the Church and are valid testimony to Christian faith in its purity. It was conceived often in ancient times monasticism as the ideal representation, in miniature, of Christ's church. The life and teachings of these monks have really influenced and played a crucial role in the moulding of Church's theology, liturgy and spirituality and many of her traditions. This is the reason why monasticism has become an essential character of eastern Churches' spirituality. Because of this close relationship, these Eastern Churches are often called 'monastic Churches'. These are Churches very deeply nourished and strongly supported by monastic life in the different aspects of their life. Monasticism has always been the carrier and guarantor of the living faith and life from the beginning, especially in the Eastern Churches. Therefore these churches are often called 'Monastic Churches'.⁴⁴

Eastern Monasticism always conscious of this great responsibility within the Church and

40. Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action*, p. 175-176.

41. W. Skudlark, *The Continuing Quest*, p. 51-60.

42. E.F. Morison, *St. Basil and his Rule*, p.39-46.

43. *Oriente Lumen*, 14.8

44. A. Boniface, *Eastern Monasticism*, p. 83

assiduously preserved and developed the proper identity of Eastern churches in their doctrine and practice. "As a plethora of recent studies has shown, monasticism is the primitive Christian value and institution of the East that has kept its original Eastern character".⁴⁵ During Dogmatic struggles and doctrinal controversies the monks often defended the orthodox faith and fostered religious seriousness among the faithful. Because of this strong sense of the Church reflected in Eastern monasticism, Pope John Paul II asserts that, "therefore, I will look to monasticism in order to identify those values which I feel are very important today for expressing the contributions of Christian East to the journey of Christ's Church towards the kingdom".⁴⁶

So far we have seen some of the conspicuous features of Eastern monasticism pointing to the fact that it represents the Church, in all her fundamental dimensions and remains as a symbolic synthesis of Christianity while striving to live the Gospel and tradition to the full. Only on this basis one can look forward to Eastern monasticism as a reference point for all people, especially for other forms of Consecrated Life in the Eastern Catholic Churches.

Call to a Paradigm Shift for Religious Congregations

All types of Christian Religious Life are in someway development from monastic ideal which originated in the Church from the beginning. They have arisen in response to the particular needs of the Church. They have adapted monastic observances and practices in greater or lesser degree for their own

purposes according to the vision of the founders. The Code of Canon of the Oriental Churches (CCEO) in its Title XII deals specifically with monasticism in the beginning before going into other different forms of Consecrated Life. All these different derivatives are of later origin in the Eastern Catholic Churches and mostly under the influence of or as the branches of western Religious Orders and Institutions. Though canonically they don't belong to monastic life proper, when one studies the nature of Eastern monasticism and its centrality in the Eastern Churches one could rightly conclude that eastern monasticism is the unique model for all religious in the Eastern Churches. Monastic life is the foundation of all Consecrated life. The monk is the paradigm of all Consecrated people.

It seems to be a paradox that the different Orders and Institutes of Consecrated life in the Eastern Catholic Churches have abandoned partially or totally their Eastern monastic heritages under the influence of the West or under the pressures of adapting themselves to the changing situations and their exigencies. This influence is clearly reflected in their theology, spirituality, devotions, methods of formation, approaches to activities etc. One could identify easily the paradigm shift that has occurred in the West on different aspects of Consecrated life has deeply affected the attitude and lifestyle of the different forms of Consecrated life in the East. The primacy of the vertical dimension to God had been shifted to the horizontal pressures and priorities. An overwhelming emphasis is given to the incarnational dimensions of

45. Ibid, p. 89.

46. *Oriental Lumen*, 99.

Church's mission in the world at the cost of neglecting the eschatological dimension instead of striking a balance between the two bringing each other in constant exchange and mutual correction. The efficiency minded activism has caused the erosion of the real spirit of contemplation and true practice of worship giving way to certain superfluous devotions and piety. All these are foreign to the whole Eastern concept and methods of Church's mission. As the eastern and patristic theology teaches us, the Church is above all a vertical reality extending itself in those horizontal dimensions. In the light of these reflections it is the fundamental duty of those Religious Congregations and Institutes in the Eastern Catholic Churches to go back to their Eastern heritage and to regain their Eastern identity. Eastern monasticism is the unique reference point and archetype of this process of going back to the sources. They have to make a constant return to these original sources.⁴⁷ These Congregations and Institutes of the Eastern Catholic Churches have a basic monastic character and vision they have inherited from their Churches which has to be retained and fostered. This does not mean that they should not engage in any apostolic activities or it is not a denial of the horizontal active involvement. Each Congregation has its own vision and plans of apostolic activities. In the Eastern monastic tradition itself we have seen already how those monks undertook enormous social, charitable, intellectual, apostolic and missionary activities. But they did not allow this horizontal dimension to

jeopardise the vertical. It was fully anchored on the vertical dimension of their life.

In this respect the primary contemplative character of the Eastern Churches has to be expressed in the life and activities of these Consecrated persons. Vat.II and Popes thereafter repeatedly remind the Churches of this primary contemplative character of Religious life.⁴⁸ John Paul II exhorts "your first task therefore must be contemplation. Every reality of consecrated life is born and regenerated each day in unending contemplation of the face of Christ".⁴⁹

These religious should be able to combine harmoniously the contemplative and active life in their invitation of our Lord. This needs a practical life fully organised accordingly. Their horizontal involvements and their needs and conditions may not become a hindrance to the fostering of the contemplative character. The religious communities have to become centres of real spirituality and God experience. Priority given to prayer and spiritual exercises are conditions for a fruitful apostolate. This deep contemplative character will invigorate the prophetic task of the Consecrated people in the modern world where people put more trust in life witness and in experience. "Prophecy is born of God from friendship with him, from attentive listening to his Word in the different circumstances of history".⁵⁰

The monastic paradigm of a life centred on worship is another area where the Consecrated people in the Eastern Catholic

47. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 1.

48. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 5, *Vita Consecrata*, 74.

49. John Paul II, *Homily (Feb. 2, 2001)*, *L'osservatore Romano*, February 4, 2001, 10

Churches need to give their special attention, in order to recover the Eastern heritage. Worship may not be one of the many 'exercises' in the religious houses but it has to become central and has to be given best attention and the best of time and energy, "They should lovingly practise it as their true 'mainstay' from which they draw their very life, their prayer and personal and communal life style; the very way of thinking. Their practical life should be penetrated with a sincere love and high esteem for this incomparable, inexhaustible treasury of their monastic fathers".⁵¹

The full and active celebration of the Divine Mysteries according to the liturgical cycles, seasons is of vital importance in this context. Monastic mission flows always from this worship and the liturgical life centred on Eucharistic Sacrifice and Divine office is the powerhouse of apostolic action.

The life of worship and the vertical dimension of religious life have to be incarnated and built up by a strong and sincere brotherly love in the community. Thus worship becomes beautiful and filled with God's presence if only it is supported by brotherly love in the daily life based upon Christ's emphasis on mutual love as the true proof of his disciples.⁵² Fraternal love, care and unity are often sacrificed or overlooked under the pressures of "activism and achievements" in religious communities. Fraternal love has to find its important place

in the religious community,⁵³ which is also a great source of apostolic power.

That strong 'sense of the church' shown by Eastern monasticism has to be manifested by the religious Congregations and Institutes of the Eastern Catholic Churches. They should have the self awareness of being the Church, being at the heart of the Church and have to be faithful to the Gospel, Traditions, liturgy, teachings and her missionary tasks. The liturgical, theological and spiritual patrimony of each individual Churches has to be protected and promoted. The Consecrated persons have to remain the faithful carriers and guarantors of the Church's true heritages. This sense of the Church has to become their way of thinking, speaking and acting. It requires serious study in the field of liturgy, theology, spirituality and monastic life of the Eastern churches and an in depth religious formation programme based on those ideals.

Eastern monasticism as a reference point and a true matrix and model challenges other forms of Consecrated life in the Eastern Catholic Churches to restore and recreate their true eastern identity and heritages. It is only through their closeness and affiliation with Eastern monastic sources they can achieve this goal. The monastic priorities and their normative value have to be accepted and re-established. In other words monasticism has to be re-established at the heart of the Consecrated life.⁵⁴

50. *Vita Consecrata*, 84.

51. A. Boniface, *Eastern Monasticism*, p.112.

52. *Ibid*, 116

53. *Vita Consecrata*, 42 11

Reference Point for All

Monasticism is always presented as integral part of Christianity. It was a lay movement in the Church. Monastic theology holds that to be a monk is, simply a wholehearted way of becoming a Christian. Neither in the end nor in the primary means is the monk essentially different from any other Christian. But he adapts a special way of life making himself free to consecrate his whole life to strive after perfection.⁵⁵ St. Basil without making any perfect distinction between simple faithful and monks, between Christian morality and monastic asceticism considered monastic life as a continuation and crowning of Christian life. For him monk is predominantly an authentic Christian.⁵⁶

Monastic life as an expression of the perfect living of the Gospel, which is the core of Christian life and the faithful upholder of Church's Tradition is always looked by the clerics and laity as a model and inspiration for Christian life and spiritual fervour. St. Augustine adapted monastic rules for clerics, "Monasterium Clericorum", in his diocese in order to make clerics to share in the movement of monasticism.⁵⁷ There are monastic movements for clerics and lay people as an overflow of the monastic fervour and spirit. The fact that so many new foundations of "monastic groups" all over the world "popping up" and are adapting monastic vision and observances to their life situations

in the world, shows that we are standing before a real reserve of hidden energy that belongs to the very life of the Church.⁵⁸

Eastern monasticism as a paradigm of perfect Christian life could instil in the laity who are living in the world and sharing in the mission of the Church those values of deep prayer life, contemplative attitude, desire for practising evangelical values, love for liturgy and traditions and a deep love for the Church.

As a reference point for all Eastern monasticism has the potential role as the agent of unity for the Churches of the East and West as well as with other religions of the world. Monasticism is considered as a bridge between Eastern and Western Catholic and non-Catholic Churches. It has got an ecumenical common medium and of paramount importance in this field. Most of the world religions have given rise to some form of monastic life as part of their spiritual heritage. This is a universal phenomenon as explained by the concept of that "hidden monastic archetype in human nature" always seeking God.⁵⁹

Therefore Eastern monasticism as a perfect form of monastic life in the church and in the world possesses a common ground for dialogue with other world religions and certain fundamental areas of unity.

Conclusion: To be promoted and revitalised Eastern monasticism as symbolic

54. J. Powathil, "Re-establish monasticism at the heart of all consecrated life", *Women in Prism and Focus*, P. Vazheeparampil (ed.), Rome, 1996.

55. Daniel Rees et al., *Consider your Call*, London, 1978, p. 3.

56. D. Amand, *L'Asese Monastique de Saint Basile*, Maredsous, 1948, p. 12.13, 94-97, 103-109.

57. A. Boniface, *Eastern Monasticism*, p. 101.

58. Ibid, 180-181.

synthesis of Christianity, which represents the fullness of the Church and standing at the heart of the mystery of the Church is an archetype for all future generations. In the words of Pope John Paul II, "the monastery is the place where creation becomes praise of God and the percept of concretely lived charity becomes the ideal of human co-existence; it is where the human beings seek God without limitation and impediment becoming a reference point for all peoples bearing them in his heart and helping them to seek God".⁶⁰

The restoration, preservation and revitalization of Eastern monasticism, especially in the Eastern Catholic Churches, are of vital importance. As we have already seen there exists an intrinsic link between the liturgical, spiritual traditions of these Churches and monastic life.

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59. *Ibid.* 12

60. *Oriente Lumen*, 9.

THE ECO-FACE OF JESUS

Dr. Joseph Naduvilezhham

The mystery of Incarnation has not only changed and redeemed the humanity but transformed the entire nature. Tertullian rightly said: Flesh is the hinge of salvation. Irenaeus observed that human nature fully alive is the glory of God. St Ephrem believed that nature is another source of revelation like Scripture. St Francis of Assisi sensed the love of God in and through nature and with this awareness he could turn even wild animals into friendly, tamed creatures.

The saints and poets could perceive the unity and oneness of the universe and its dynamic balance and the wholeness of nature. They were affected by a deep sense of the Sacred. The hermits and anchorites lived in close association with nature but in perfect detachment from it and in closer union with God, the Author of nature. They could contemplate the Divinity hidden but manifested in nature. The beauty of this world and of the whole creation was a subject of their worship and prayer.

Jesus has been the source of inspiration for the saints in their eco-vision. We find that Jesus lived very close to nature and he made use of all the things of nature as the best media of his teaching. The imagery drawn from nature is the subject of his parables and the phenomena of nature are the contexts of his miracles. All the symbols of nature point to God, the Creator and Christ, the Redeemer.

1. JESUS AND THE HUMANS

Jesus dealt with all kinds of people and encountered them in a humane manner. He chose twelve young men as his disciples who were always with him during his public life (Lk 6,12-16). He taught them many things, He sent them out where he wanted to go later (Mt 6,7-13). They were all very human with all their weaknesses, frailty and emotions. They had their ambitions. Some of them dreamed of an honourable position in his Kingdom (Mk 10,35-40). It created envy in others and Jesus had to correct them (Mk 10,40-45).

1) *Jesus the Healer*

The sick earned special attention of Jesus: the daughter of the Canaanite woman (Mt 15,21-28); the epileptic boy whom his disciples could not heal (Mt 17,14-21); the paralytic man (Mt 9,1-8); the two blind men (Mt 9,27-31); the dumb man (Mt 9,32-34); the two possessed men (Mt 8,28-34); the centurion's servant (Mt 8,5-13); the leper (Mt 8,1-4); the mother-in-law of Peter (Mk 1,29-31); the deaf and dumb man (Mk 7,31-37); the man with a withered hand (Mk 3,1-6); the blind man, Bar Thimaeus, of Jericho (Mk 10,46-52); the hunchbacked woman (Lk 13,10-13).

(2) *Jesus' Mercy to Sinners:*

Jesus listened to their story with sympathy, empathy and kindness and forgave their sins

and gave them peace of mind: the sinful woman (Lk 7,36-50); Zacheus (Lk 19,1-10); the forgiven publican at the temple (Lk 18,9-14); Call of Levi (Mt 19,9-13); the story of the prodigal son and his kind father (Lk 15,11-32).

(3) *Jesus loved Children:*

He carried them in his arms and blessed them with love and affection (Mt 19,13-15). He puts the child as the model for everybody who wants to enter the kingdom of heaven ((Mt 18,1-5; Lk 18,15-17).

(4) *Jesus was merciful to the bereaved:*

He raised Lazar to life and removed the sorrow of his friends Martha and Mary (Jn 11,39-44). He was kind enough to raise the only son of the widow of Naim (Lk 7,11-17). He gave back the life of Jairus' daughter (Mt 9,18-26).

(5) *Warning to hypocrites:*

Jesus strongly warned against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, Scribes and Lawyers who interpreted the Law in their own way and made it a burden to the ordinary people (Mt 23,1-39) and pleaded for kindness and understanding towards the simple people. He cautioned his disciples against the piety of these hypocrites.

(6) *He subdued the powers of Nature for the safety of man:*

Then he rose and rebuked the winds, and the sea; and there was a great calm" (Mt 8,26). And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea (Mt 14,25). He multiplied the bread and fed four thousand men (Mt 15,32-39) and on another occasion fed five thousand (Jn 6,5-14). And he promised: Whoever gives to one of these little

ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you he shall not lose his reward" (Mt 10,42)

(7) *His Parables:*

In many of his parables people were treated: The parable of the ten virgins (Mt 25,1-12); the parable of the talents: the talents are given to three people: (Mt 14-30); the parable of the marriage feast; (Mt 22,1-14); the parable of the householder and the vineyard (Mt 21,33-44); the parable of the two sons (Mt 21,28-32); the parable of the labourers of the vineyard (Mt 20,1-16); the parable of the unforgiving servant (Mt 18,21-35); the unfaithful but prudent steward (Lk 16,1-9).

(8) *The organs of the human body are given due place in his moral teaching:*

The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness (Mt 5,22-23). If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell (Mt 5,29). And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members, than that your whole body go into hell (Mt 5,30). And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black (Mt 5,36). But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also (Mt 5,39).

(9) *Domestic Realities related to man:*

House: A wise man builds his house on the rock and it stands. A foolish man builds his house on sand and it falls when rain, wind and flood come (Mt 7,24-27). *Gate:* Enter by

the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few(Mt7,13-14). *Room*: But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who sees in secret will reward you (Mt 6,6). *Yoke*: For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light(Mt 11,30). *Cloak and Coat*: and if anyone would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well (Mt 5,40). In the scene of Last Judgment Jesus describes the real needs of man: as feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming the strangers, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and the imprisoned (Mt 25, 34-40).

(10) *A wide cross section of the society* come across in relationship to him: king and queen, priests and Levites, centurion and soldiers, rich and the poor, friends and enemies, farmers and merchants, fishermen, servants and maid-servants, stewards, faithful and unfaithful wards, the handicapped, the sick, holy men and women and sinners, relatives of family. So too we see all the seasons of weather, wind, rain storm, sky, clouds, sun, moon, stars, air, fire, water, waves, sea, etc.

2. JESUS AND THE ANIMAL WORLD

Jesus mentions many animals in his teachings: The parable of the lost sheep (Lk 15,1-7); the parable of the shepherd and sheep (Jn 10,1-18); Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and the thieves do not break in and steal (Mt 6,19-20). "Do not give dogs what is holy and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under foot and turn to attack you" (Mt 7,6). It is not fair to

take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs"(Mt 15,26). "...Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head"(Mt 8,20)." Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves (Mt 10,16). For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God (Lk 18,25). ...They brought the ass and the colt, and put their garments on them, and he sat hereon..(Mt 21,7); "Again the kingdom of heaven is like a net which was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind (Mt 13,47).

3. JESUS AND THE PLANTS

The theme of his parables are also the plants, trees, fruits, seeds and so on.

Tree and fruits: So every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit, A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. (Mt 7, 18).

Jesus curses the fig tree that bore no fruits and the tree withered at once (Mt 21,18-19). The theme of his beautiful parable of the sower and the seeds is taken from nature and man's day-to-day experience (Mt 13,1-9). He gives its beautiful interpretation a little later (Mt 13,18-23).

It is in his Sermon on the Mount that Jesus touches the world of plants very amply: the lilies of the field are more beautiful than the royally dressed Solomon (Mt 6,28-29); the parable of the seeds and weeds beautifully pictures the situation of the good and the bad people growing together in this world awaiting their own retribution (Mt 13,24-30). The parable of the mustard seed and that of the leaven and

meal shows us clearly the growth of the kingdom of heaven in us (Mt 13,31-33). The parable of the treasure hidden in the field and of the precious pearl inspires everybody to make the prompt decision for the kingdom of heaven at all cost (Mt 13,44-46).

4. JESUS AND THE BIRDS OF THE AIR

The lessons on the Providence of God are best illustrated from the life of the birds.

Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they (Mt 6,26-27)?

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's will (Mt 10,29).

CONCLUSION

Jesus in his teaching has touched all realities of nature that are very familiar to the common man. He appreciates the beauty of ordinary plants and flowers, trees and fruits, animals and birds. He feeds the hungry, heals the sick, cleanses the lepers and restores thereby the original status of order, health and innocence. The day-to-day human experiences like family meal, banquet, marriage, funeral etc are the scenes where he teaches high lessons of humility (Lk 14,1-11) nobility and selflessness (Lk 14,12-14).

The eco-vision of Jesus teaches us many valuable lessons. He was eco-friendly in his approach and attitudes. He went on foot all through his travels - from Jerusalem till Nazareth and backwards and sideways. Sometimes he used a boat to cross the lake. His eco-footprint was very low. He consumed very little. He did not have any possessions except the seamless tunic he wore. He did not have a home of his own. He was moving about like a pilgrim having left his home in Nazareth at his thirty. Often he was received

as a guest. He ate very little and did not get time for it and hence he was often hungry. He was roaming about teaching people and healing them. He spent long hours at night in prayer. He alleviated others' pains and reduced the burden of many.

As the 'son of a carpenter' he must have known a lot about trees and wood and houses. He was a man of aesthetic sense. He had beautiful stories to narrate: the story of the good Samaritan, the story of the prodigal son and his kind father, the story of Zacheus, that of the Samaritan woman, the blind men of Jericho, of the Syro-Pheonician woman, of the unforgiving servant and many others. He listened to their stories more than told them his own. He was certainly musical and knew many Psalms by heart that he sang on different occasions.

Jesus was very positive in his outlook. He appreciated the innocence of children, the gratitude of the Samaritan leper who took time to thank his healer (Lk 7,18). He admired the deep faith of ordinary people (Mk 1,32-34; Mk 5,34) and of gentiles like the Canaanite woman (Mt 15,28). He warns against giving scandals to children (Mt 18,6-7). He found goodness in everybody and mentioned it. His appreciative presence was felt by all and it was an example for his disciples too. The eco-face of Jesus should inspire us every moment to utter words of appreciation in our conversation, when we meet people, or when we part from them. We must be able to enjoy nature and its gifts with gratitude to God without exploitation and excess and learn to be at leisure and radiate joy and optimism.

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NEWS

Catholic News Portal launched

Kottayam: See More Catholic News, a new next stride catholic news portal is launched by the seminarians from St. Thomas Apostolic Seminary. The news portal was inaugurated by Chananacherry Archbishop Mar Joseph Powathil and its logo was released by Seminary Rector, Dr. George Madathikandam, on 7th September, 2006. It is a noncommercial news network feeder to other personal homepages; it provides live news content to several personalized homepages like google, yahoo, msn, aol etc. This site is supported by priests and sisters abroad, and those who wish can join with this endeavor by registering their name in the site. Some of its main features are: Catholic News from around the globe, Feeders to any site, Live news updating, Authorized Free Journalist Membership, Catholic Blog, News in Mobile – www.mobile.smcnews.com (WAP/GPRS). Its future enhancements include Podcasting, Live Web TV, and Live Web Radio. It can be accessed in www.smcnews.com.

Rev. Fr. Thomas Thuruthimattam, appointed as the Bishop of Gorakhpur

Most Rev. Thomas, belonging to the Congregation of St. Therese (C.S.T.) has been appointed as the Bishop of the Diocese of Gorakhpur. He was born in 1947. He made his religious profession on 17th May, 1965, and was ordained priest on 21st December, 1973. He holds the degree of Licentiate in Christology from the University of Leuven. He spent first 4 years of his priestly ministry in the Little Flower Ashram of Mookkannur (Kerala), Sacred Heart Orphanage. After 2 years in the Gorakhpur Mission (1977-1979), he served in Ausburg (Germany) (1979-1982). Then, he became the Rector of the Diocesan Minor Seminary of Gorakhpur (1983-1986) and was appointed Chancellor of Gorakhpur (1986-1987). After one year Rectorship at the Minor Seminary, C.S.T., Bal Bhavan of Mookkannur, he was appointed General Procurator, Councillor and Provincial Finance Officer, Vicar Provincial of the St. Thomas Province, General (1989-1994), and later on, he exercised pastoral ministry in France (1995-2003). Since 2003 and at the time of his appointment as Bishop of Gorakhpur, Most Rev. Thomas Thuruthimatam was the Superior General of his Congregation.

Mons. Sebastian Thekethecheril, appointed as the Bishop of Vijayapuram

Most Rev Sebastian, belonging to the diocese of Vijayapuram, has been appointed as the bishop of Vijayapuram. He was born in 1954 and ordained priest in 1980 for the Diocese

of Vijayapuram. Bishop-elect Sebastian Theckethecheril was, before his appointment as Bishop, Parish Priest, Secretary to the Bishop and Vicar General of Vijayapuram Diocese. He did his Philosophy and Theology studies at St. Joseph's Pontifical Seminary in Alwaye and obtained Doctorate in Canon Law from the Urbaniana in Rome. His installation was held on 2nd June 2006 at Vijayapuram Cathedral.

Most Rev. Gratian Mundadan, appointed as Apostolic Visitor

Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI, has appointed His Excellency Mar Gratian Mundadan Apostolic Visitor for the Syro-Malabars in India outside the territorium proprium. The duty of the Apostolic Visitor would be to interact with the various Latin-Rite jurisdictions outside the territorium proprium, namely, primarily outside the Kerala area, in order to co-ordinate the work in the areas of evangelization and pastoral care, and help arrive at appropriate responses to concrete situations and to suggest course of action on behalf of the CBCI.

Syro-Malabar Global Meet

The 365 delegates of the 8.5 Lakh Syro-Malabar Catholics who are migrants in America, Arab Countries, Australia, and other foreign countries and the different Indian cities outside Kerala like Delhi, Chennai, Bangalore, Surat, Kolkotta gathered for the first time in history with the Major Archbishop and members of the Syro-Malabar Synod in the Major Archiepiscopal Curia for three days from August 18 to 21, 2006. Union minister Vayalar Ravi inaugurated the meet, the inaugural function was presided over by Major Archbishop Cardinal Mar Varkey Vithayathil. Bishop Paul Hinder (Apostolic Vicar of Saudi Arabia), Justice Kurian Joseph (Kerala High Court) addressed the gathering. The meeting discussed the spiritual heritage and the identity, globalization, relativism, cultural diversity, unjust exploitative tendencies meted out to the NRIs by the State Government in the realm of education etc.

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